

人類は衰退しました

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田中 ロミオ

イラスト / 戸部 淑



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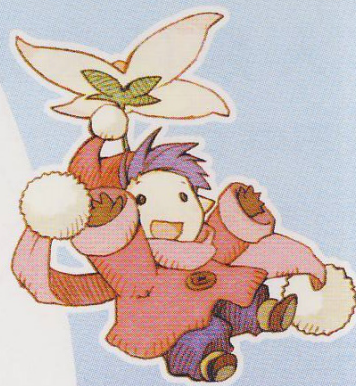
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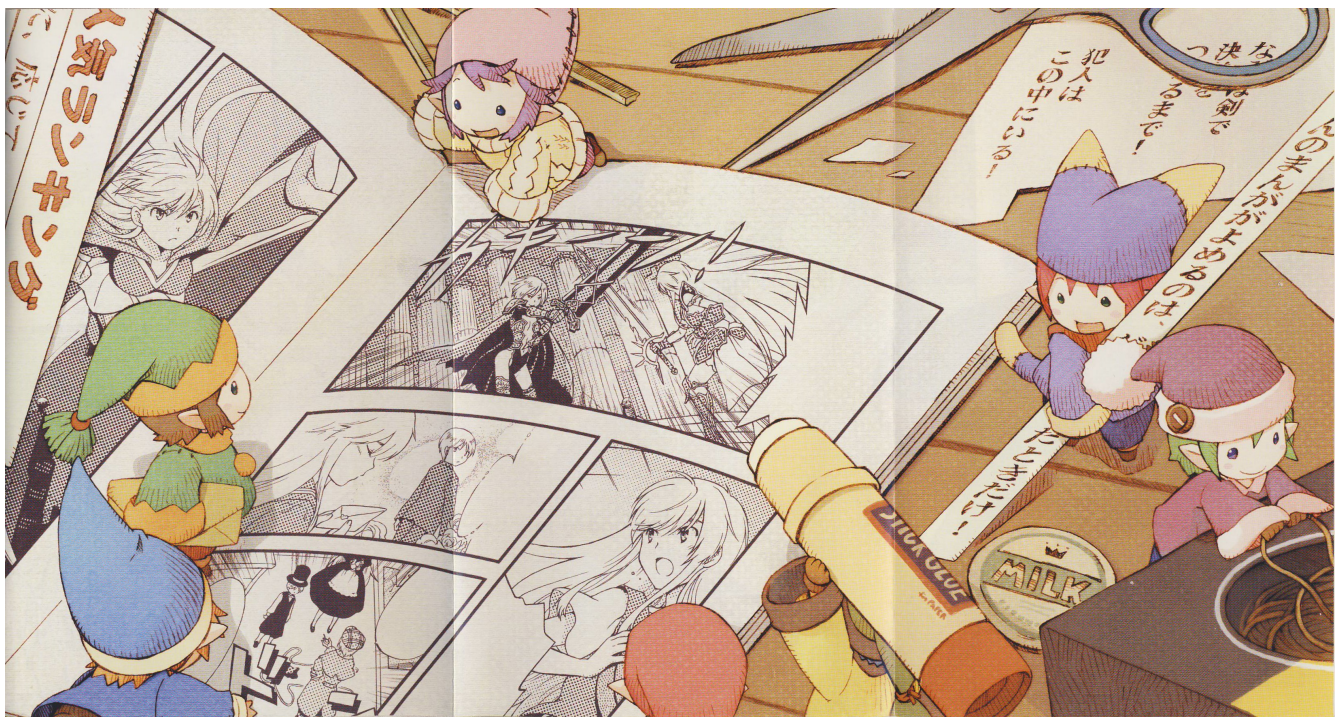
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デザイン／一尾成臣





人類は衰退しました

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MAIN CHARACTERS

主要キャラクター

Protagonist (Watashi, "I") Narrator of the story. Mediator of Kusunoki Village. **Fairies** at present, the people who count as humanity on this Earth. **Grandfather** Protagonist's grandfather. Boss of the Office of Mediation in Kusunoki Village.

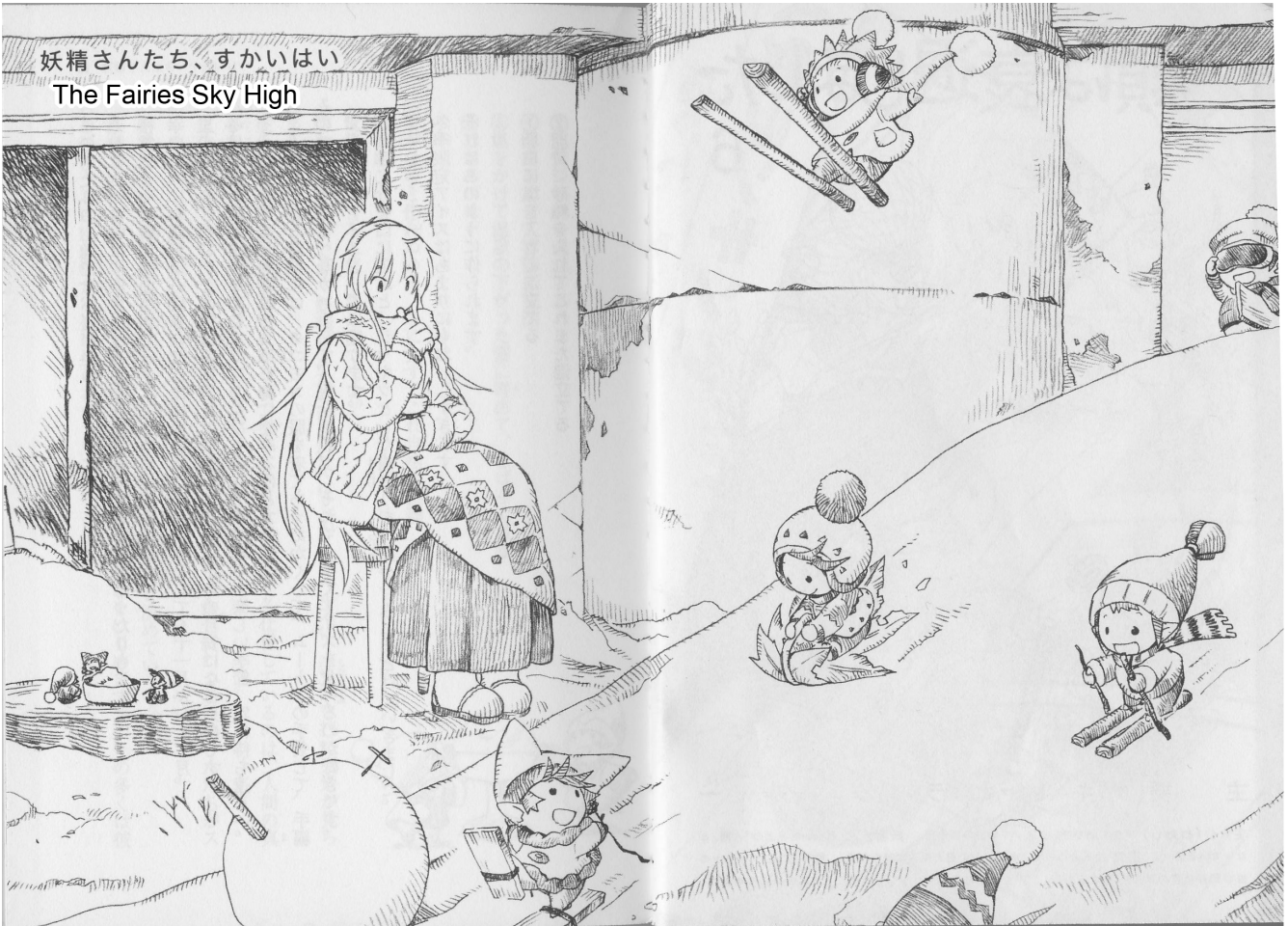
Assistant a youth who works as assistant to the Office of Mediation in Kusunoki Village, **Y** a girl the same age as Protagonist. Slender of face and physique, an attractive silver-haired lady.

From the Back Cover

Humanity Has Declined 6

Humanity has met with a gradual decline, and for some centuries now. Earth was now the property of the Fairies. Acting as intermediary between said fairies and humans were the international public servants known as Mediators, which was my job. I headed south as a member of the Cannon Club, Grandfathers' hobby circle, and was employed as a member of the safety team for the Aviation Contest. Or so I thought, but... I found that everybody was going to die. I got sealed in a white room with my friend Y as Kusunoki Village became the setting for the Same-Sex Magazine Event! Now then, who is the dangerous one?! –the records are vague.

妖精さんたち、すかいはい
The Fairies Sky High



In the land around these parts, once Summer ended, Winter came immediately. And, generally, October needed not even have arrived before snow started falling. Snow level: 30 centimeters.

Happily there was only one snowing, the next serious snow will come November or December.

For the people of the Village, this snowing told them that it was time to prepare for Winter. They always stocked up an abundance of food for it, so Winter was a fun season that they could spend lazing about indoors. People actually and really looked forwards to it.

That said, the cold of course permeated all the way into the skin.

In this all too cold season I liked to wear stuffy and warm clothes, sheepskin gloves, a hand-knit scarf, ear muffs and, fully kitted, go and eat ice cream.

I served my just readied ice cream into a container.

I carried one bite to the mouth and the chilly texture melted into sweetness in an instant.

"Delicious..."

Ice cream in Winter was excessively delicious.

It was prepared like this.

- ①Add salt to egg white and whip.
- ②Add sugar to egg yolk and whip as well.
- ③Whip the raw cream.
- ④Mix all and seal in a container.
- ⑤Add salt, bury under low-temperature snow, and leave for a while.
- ⑥Done!

As it could not be made without snow, I had ice cream in Winter. It was the natural order of things.

A refrigerator?

It used too much electricity, people would get angry.

On the stump we used as table we could witness the scene of fairies licking their lips in anticipation of the first ice cream of the season.



I did not believe they even know the concept of freezing to death, but I had a feeling that their being prepared for Winter anyway was them just imitating humans.

The fairies that had already ate were having a ski jumping contest in the snow mountain that had been created next to the Cultural Center (elevation 2 meters).

They slid down the incline with tiny wooden skis, performing quite the nice leaps.

The fairies started these sort of time-wasting endeavors when bored, but the majority did not stimulate them enough.

That being said, the fun of sliding down the snow surface was something special, and they have been skiing since before noon.

However, once noon passed they seemed to get tired of it, as they began to do things crazier and crazier.

"Backward skiing!"

He skied back first and slammed into a rock.

"Combined skiing!"

Five people skied like feathers, slammed into a rock and scattered.

"Dada skiing!"

This one did not ski, he just said stupid jokes at the top of the mountain.

"How long will my fox friend be waiting at that meeting place-cone!"

...that was difficult to understand.

That said, this was their limit.

The fairies always sought higher levels of entertainment, and that was why they traveled.

"A new way of skiing... a new... super cool..."

The next athlete stood at the top of the snow mountain and began skiing.

And smoothly down the incline went the fairy.

But then, a bud quickly sprouted from the tip of his head, and as he was skiing it bloomed into a flower.

The flower began spinning faster and faster, and the fairy easily took off.

It was like a helicopter.

With how much lifting power a flower spinning could create aside, it appeared he did not think as far as to how to balance away the anti-torque that was created that way.

And so he began spinning the other way.

"Say'nara!"

And like that, he vanished on the far side of the sky.

Truly a fleeting life, his.

But flying free in the sky like that seemed fun.

"What if I could fly free in the sky too..."

Soon as I said that, I quickly shut up.

With that being too late, the fairies gathered at my feet looked wordlessly up at me.

"Master human!" "You want!" "To fly!" "Free!" "In the sky?"

"No."

"But it's so easy?"

"No!"

The majority of Fairy Tools were attractions that ignored safety up to the very limits of the possible, stuff that I would generally pass on.

"...I see..."

The fairies looked sad as they left.

If I had come out and said I wanted to fly in the sky, they would show an excess of hospitality, and before long I would come to have the bitter experience of being flung into the stratosphere.

"That was close."

I sunk deep into the chair for break time and I felt floating upwards.

"HyEEEH!"

The chair continued rising steadily, with enough speed to quickly pass the height of the rooftop.

I swerved my head back and forth, and I spotted several flower propellers growing on the back of the chair.

Before I was transported somewhere up too high I nimbly picked them off, and as the lifting power stopped being sufficient, I managed to land relatively safely on the snow.

"OwChChCh..."

I could not hate them for installing all that in the chair in a single instant...

A little while after that event, a UN notice reached our Office.

"We're gonna depart for the South in two weeks."

An impromptu flower bed had been built next to the Office.

Grandfather came to me and said that as I was taking care of them.

"Huh?"

"Gotta start making ready for the trip. Gotta make ready to transport components, too."

"Excuse me a moment, please. What exactly is this about?"

"I don't think I told you. We're having a contest," he said calmly.

"And our Kusunoki Cannon Club's gonna participate, too."

"Huh?"

My surprise was in four times the font size.

"And this Cannon Club would be..."

"What we named our hobby circle. You're a member, too."

"Without even asking me... no, well, that aside. Did you say we are going on a trip?"

"Right. If we postpone this any further, we're gonna get too deep into the Winter."

"But the time to make ready for Winter is now. A trip at this time, truly..."

"The contest itself will be over in one day. It's just gonna take a few days for the round trip."

"Well, if that is the case," I was mostly convinced. "Wait, Grandfather. What kind of contest would that be, exactly."

"Hum, well..."

His reading glasses shone.

"A flying ace contest."

The instant I heard those words, thu-thuum, I solidified as if electric current had passed through me.

They wanted to fly, free in the sky...

Two weeks later there was a gathering of the people who were going to head south from Kusunoki Village.

By caravan, by foot, by car... they even procured a public transportation bus, things looked ready for a Great Migration.

The people were all either participating in the flying ace contest or spectators for it.

Solar-powered cars were all slow, and since Grandfather, I, and Assistant-san as well had to reach the place first, we came to travel via our private horse carriage.

"Unbelievable, I would have never thought that you would join the Cannon Club and are now going to participate to the human-powered helicopter project, Assistant-san."

Assistant-san, trim and tidy in his going-out outfit, proudly attached the metal member badge to his chest.

Cannon Club Member 002—

"You think this circle is just us, but you're wrong."

Grandfather, on the driver's platform, turned back towards the cargo platform and said that.

"Our club gathers people with highly inquisitive minds without discrimination of age or sex."

"But there was no need to drag Assistant-san in to pad the member roster."

"He's light of weight. He's short. And still he's got stamina. He's the ideal pilot. His presence is indispensable for our project."

I stared at the group of wooden boxes that filled the cargo hold.

The majority of the disassembled and boxed packages were parts for a human-powered helicopter.

"A human-powered helicopter would be powered by pedals, correct?"

"Yeah, it's sort of like a bicycle with a propeller attached."

"Can you really make it fly just with leg power?"

"Theoretically it should be possible to fly using human strength."

"The-o-re-ti-cal-ly?"

"It's actually unfinished," them older people always said cruel things so easily, indeed. "Still, in actuality it could be said to be nearly finished."

Them older people always said overly optimistic things so easily, indeed.

"Once we're done with final assembly, the rest is just a matter of adjustments."

"..."

I lost words at his tone, which it made it sound like the impossible became possible once an older person put his hands to it.

"Assistant-san, you had better give it up, being a pilot I mean."

Despite that advice, Assistant-san did not show one shred of sense of danger and just smiled broadly.

I had a hunch.

He too wanted to fly, free in the sky...

To a silly person like me, who was as scared of high places as anybody else, it was quite hard to understand.

"Be at ease. We're not using any fairy technology. The project was put together by superb craftsmen born of mankind."

I knew that a countless number of wooden gears were stuffed inside the wooden crates.

"To make it lighter we're not even using metal components. Materials're wood and resin and cloth."

"Huh."

I did not quite understand the romance of men.

"Being short's more convenient. If you were light in weight and short in height, you could be a pilot too."

"Good thing, then..."

At a time like this I was thankful for my tall height, I was.

"That, over there. On that cape."

Assistant-san and I leaned out from the cargo platform and gazed at a scene surrounded by the ocean.

The wide open ocean beyond the southernmost edge of the land still had quite the heat of Summer left to it, and was shining softly.

We were down south, so, of course, it was warmer than in the north.

"The ocean water's still warm this season, so even if we happen to fall into it we won't freeze."

Grandfather's sentence was filled with a tinge of unfortunate premonition.

The flying ace contest. Abbreviated, FlyCon.

I believe it obvious, but I received a summary explanation and found it was a contest where people competed for elevation using human powered flying devices.

They were going to depart from the cape and fly out towards the sea.

That was because, since they flew over the sea, the likelihood of dying in a crash would lower.

To say what I really wanted, this would have been an event that should have been held in a warmer season like Spring or Summer, indeed, but, well, this is what we called the indiscretion of older men.

To say what 'human powered flying device' indicated, well, it was a little bit peculiar.

To put it bluntly, anything would be fine as long as it was 'made by their own power', so it went.

Gliders, jet fighters, UFOs equipped with anti-gravity engines, all were OK.

What was forbidden was direct usage of excavated scientific technologies.

In other words, using engines or flying machines directly as excavated was strictly forbidden.

Replicating excavated technology by using it as reference was not a problem. There were not really many people who had those technological and engineering skills in the first place anyway.

This contest thing, too, in nine cases out of ten would just become a showcase for anachronistic technology.

On that, borrowing the powers of the fairies was also forbidden. Their intervention would destroy the very meaning of the competition.

Still, all that being that, there were also points that bothered me.

They were, in short, how this event had no fantasy-like safety valve.

Spotting young men and women stranded next to the road, Grandfather stopped the carriage.

There was a group of three people, a youth with silver hair that might at most be no more than 20 years old, and a boy and a girl that seemed to be in their early teens.

The look in their eyes was identical, so I thought they were siblings.

Right next to them there was a wizened old truck, which was seemingly what they were riding on. The instant he saw it, Grandfather's eyes thinned in happiness.

"That's a diesel truck, right?"

"Yes. It's an antique," answered the silver haired youth.

"As you can see, it has no solar panels installed. The fuel we were supplied with ran out faster than we thought. Whatever else, it was the first time we made a trip this far out, so we completely miscalculated this."

"That's a problem. If you want, you can ride with us, all right?"

"We thank you for the offer, but we can't leave this here."

So went the youth, who glanced at the large cargo riding on the truck.

Grandfather seemed to understand what it was.

"So you're going to the flying ace contest, right?"

"Yes, we're going to participate. This is our Van der Graaf Zeppelin, the Electric Count Zeppelin."

There was a large machine covered with a tarp on the truck's cargo platform. So it was an aircraft.



"Fine, let's do this. There's a bus making a round trip from our Village. Ask them to tow you. Just tell them my name, you should be fine. I'm a Mediator in Kusunoki Village, my name is..."

"Thank you very much! We are grateful!"

The youth made a full-face smile that illuminated his surroundings. That smile was so bright it sort of irritated me.

The three, as per initial impression, were... elder brother / younger brother / younger sister.

The younger brother and sister were twins. And as expectable they looked similar.

They seemed to get along all too well, as while their older brother was talking, they looked in from behind hand in hand with mirrored poses. How adorable.

The trio had all silver hairs and were dressed in trim, good clothes that made them look like a doll set.

They came from quite the affluent family, that was clear.

Of course, things such as aircraft would be a hobby for the rich, indeed.

"This may be rude, but may I have you take these two ahead to the venue? They seem tired from the voyage, and I would like to avoid having them sleep outdoors right before the contest."

"Don't mind it. Do you have lodging arrangements?"

"Yes. In the village with the contest, under our names."

"I'll take the responsibility and deliver them. You two, come and look after them."

"Well then, Assistant-san, let us move that box."

We rearranged the cargo platform and made a space for two people to seat.

"Pleased to." "Meet you."

The two split a single sentence in two and bowed their heads simultaneously.

"We'll be." "In your care."

With the lisping but courteous boy and girl riding, the carriage once again set off.

"Lady, are you." "The pilot of the aircraft?"

The twins looked at me with wide eyes as they asked.

"I am not the pilot. The pilot is Assistant-san, over here."

"Then you might." "Be our rival."

The two looked at each other and Assistant-san smiled like he was their older brother.

"...I hope we even get to that point."

I had this feeling that said it will end just before that.

"Our flying device." "Is super high-tech," went the twins.

"Does it run on dry cells?"

The two shook their heads.

"It's got a Van der Graaf Hutchison drive." "It's a fully electric flying device," the voices of the two matched.

"All us three are flying it."

"And, did you three build it alone?" This was Grandfather on the driving platform.

"Big brother built it." "We just helped."

"If that's true, you guys might be a good bet for victory."

He said that sort of like he knew.

"Grandfather, do you know? About that drive thing they said."

"I read some documents about what the Hutchison Effect is, but I don't really understand it. It uses electromagnetic waves to generate anti-gravity or something. If they're saying they really built that, they'll be able to fly free in the air. Their victory's assured. Your big brother looks young, but it looks like he's really the focused researcher."

"Big brother is." "The obsessive type."

At this point, I had the feeling that only weird people participated to this contest.

After several hours of being shaken by the horse carriage, we at long last approached the south cape, and we came to smell the scent of lake.

"My, there are more of us."

Another horse carriage was riding ahead.

Likely more FlyCon attendees.

There was something like a glider with its wings folded riding on its cargo tray.

"They're with us, they're with us." "It's colleagues of ours."

The twins pointed at another truck.

A large wheeled vehicle with a massive cannon installed on it was sluggishly headed for the cape.

"A-, a cannon?"

"We thought about it, too. Though not forbidden, it's clearly a gray zone, and I can see it getting forbidden from next time onwards."

Grandfather just went and said something only he could understand.

Our horse carriage seemed to have a lighter load, as we easily overtook the horse carriage and the truck that were ahead.

A bearded rider on the cannon trailer gave us a fixed glare.

"Beardy!" "Scawy!"

Assistant-san did not move as he drew Mr. Beard on his sketchbook.

"...then how come we are named the Cannon Club?"

"It's a symbol of romance. Romance is important. What other benefit has humanity given to other species outside of civilization?"

"Fireworks!" "Booom!"

The twins stood up and leaned out from the cargo platform.

The venue was very close now.

We crawled up a fairly tall hill and a massive square filled with tents of all colors rushed straight into our eyes.

Lively fireworks, a crowd of people, and lots of cars, trucks, and horse carriages, the likes of which could only be seen at times like these... it felt like a festival.

Being noisy was a good thing. As long as we did not get involved in anything problematic.

This time I will be a laid-back spectator and rest my bones. That was the grandiose plan I set myself onto.

Soon as we arrived, the bigshot from the UN, Mister VIP, made a stunning appearance.

"Yah, welcome! We were just a little shorthanded. Your pleasant cooperation fills us with gratitude! Enough that, if you were running for some election, I'd give you a vote. Well, you might not value block voting."



I was given a vigorous handshake by this thick older gentleman, I was shaken in every direction without even the time to utter words of refusal.

"Your job's settled. You will be given the great responsibility of being on the Safety Committee! Come, read through this thick book tonight. The job will be waiting for you tomorrow! I can see the bright future of Earth and mankind resting on your shoulders, no mistake. We can't have people dying here! No accidents either, please. Scandals... nonsense! I want the fresh power of a young person to be in harmonious balance! Adios!"

That storm-like mister left, and I was left with a Bible-thick contest book and an armband that said Safety Committee.

"I am finished..."

I got involved in this in the end.

"Thank you." "Very much!"

We took the siblings to the city of the contest, then set down the packages and headed to our lodgings.

Grandfather and Assistant-san, in the next room, went out to pick up the human powered helicopter.

In a single room with just me, I could do nothing but quickly skim the text.

As expected, the contest safety management recorded on it was full of holes and gaps, it was quite terrible.

The flying ace contest was a flying competition where people charged off a cliff and flew towards the sea.

The course drew a circle, and people landed back in the original spot.

If they fell in the sea on the way they failed, and the preventive measure taken was to have a boat on standby so that a rescue team could be easily dispatched. However, if an accident or a breakdown made the contestant head for the open sea, the tiny boat could not follow them that far.

And on that matter, they had no idea what-so-ever of what to do.

They were all going to die! There were going to be lots of dead!

And then I will just be made responsible for it all!

"That bigshot asked for the impossible..."

This was the first time I wanted to take someone down from his position this badly.

I put some effort in it and read the rule book in one hour, and then, in order to first of all see the situation at hand, I went to perform an inspection of the human powered flying vehicles. The contest itself was going to begin in two days. That being said, there was no time. If the safety of the aircraft was the highest priority, my job would have become a fair bit easier. On one side of the venue there were warehouses of old make, and each team was assigned one as a garage.

Entry number 1, team Schwalbel.

"Our team, yeah, we got a real jet plane with a jet engine installed!"

A middle-aged man that looked ready to fight clenched his fists tight as he explained with vigor.

"M-, my apologies, but did you use an excavated engine?"

"We ain't! We replicated it, like the rules say! Look at it, it's an axial flow turbo jet! Ain't no other team that can built this! JEEEEET!"

Team Schwalbel's flying device seemed to have the proper shape for an airplane.

"What are your flying records?"

"It's the first flight! JEEET!"

"...huh?"

"If only we'd had one more week, we could've had test flights back home, but... well, we'll decide where to precisely install the engine with today's assemblage, see, but I can feel it with my hands that it's gonna work."

"...excuse me?!"

"Well, we got a real-deal airplane here, the other teams' human-powered aircraft can't compete. We're just gonna take that victory."

I wanted to tell him that he was disqualified over and over.

The safety committee had to guarantee safety, but their job was not given the permission to stop participating teams from entering the contest.

As a warning sign inside my brain fomented vertigo, I went to the next team.

Entry number 2, Team Birdman.

Their vehicle was based off of a bicycle with multiple wings attached, called the Birdman.

"I see Team Birdman is using plenty of feathers."

That was totally going to fall down, were the words I narrowly managed to swallow.

"Yeees, it's sooo truuue, it's sooo amazing."

A light-looking youth around his twenties gave me a big smile.

The teammates behind him seemed to be mostly going along with him.

"Well, as you see, everybody on the team went along and stuck wings to it, hah hah hah!"

"Huh... you just went along and stuck them there, but your lives depend on it."

The many and pointless wings were all too obviously brittle.

Also, the materials differed wildly. So did the sizes. Engineering planning: zero.

Wings were mostly unbalanced at the sides, and I could only see it as some sort of half-joke of a museum exhibit with lots of wings stuck there.

Worse, it was human powered. That power was going to be divided among the many wings it had.

...no matter how I looked at it, that thing was going to fall apart in flight.

"Do you have any safety devices installed?"

"Welll, we sooo didn't think about that stuff, after all, see, we had to make it lighter, lighter!"

"Then why..." my voice shivered. "Why are you wearing a chicken suit!"

"Well, you can't not have it! Gotta go along with it!"

These people were making fun of the sky.

It was not just Team Birdman. The other teams were also terrible.

Entry number 3, Team Hot Air Balloon.

"We're competing with an air balloon because we wanted to be safe. What do you say. We're going to win, no mistake!"

An old man with a red face stuck up his thumb.

"It is not an aircraft but an air balloon? What to say, would it not be too slow?"

"That there's true, we wanted to make an aircraft, but we couldn't find anything but air balloons in our documents. Well, we decked it out in many ways, so it can in fact fly free."

Entry number 4, Team DaVinci.

Their flying device was just an umbrella screwed on top of a round scaffold (and of wooden planks at that).

"But why I do have this feeling like I have seen this before?"

"It's called a helicopter, what a man called DaVinci proposed far in the past."

The participating competitor, with cutesy eyes but a short build, explained it like that.

"This is very different from the helicopters I know... right?"

"It's called the ancestor to helicopters, is how it goes."

"S-, so it is... I did not know that."

I could only conclude that it could not fly.

And as before, there were no safety devices.

Entry number 5, Team Mouse.

"This is quite the well-done glider, is it not. This one is good, indeed, this one is good."

For humanity at present, replicating a glider was simple.

As long as there was nothing out of the ordinary, it was not going to be dangerous to fly, indeed.

"Heh, heh heh heh... being told that's a reward for me..."

A bandit-like man (everyone in this team, including the maintenance staff, had an air of being bandits to them) gave me a candidly lovable smile.

"Our team researches excavated technology with the support of the UN, and as we looked to reignite the fire of lost technology, we decided to bring the result of our research to this contest."

Entry number 6, Deuterium Plasma Drive Research Lab.

Everybody in the team was dressed in labcoats, it was a team with an uncommonly serious mood.

The machine bothered me, because it was...

"I-, is this... a flying saucer?"

Dead center in the garage was a silver saucer.

"Exactly. Once this deuterium plasma drive is employed, all matters of aerodynamics are pointless. We can soar freely and quickly into the sky. This is the level of technology that mankind held in their hands in the past!"

"Still, just how exactly was this put together...?"

The team leader's glasses shone.

"Among jet engines, the more common ones are those that achieve propulsive power by emitting a jet created by an internal combustion mechanism out of a nozzle in the rear.

According to our research, this type of propulsive power has been use for an unusually long time in the history of mankind. However, later generations have been able to create even

more powerful jets. One of them was this, the deuterium plasma. The propulsive power gained from it is incomparable not only to propellers, of course, but also to other jets. But that's not all, in order to achieve stable flight there was a high-level..."

"T-, that is enough."

It was supertechnology that truly made my back shiver...!

I could not quite follow along with the explanation. It felt like I had no space to speak up.

But that was what a group of specialist would do. I had a feeling it would be fine to trust them.

"This team seems to be doing fine."

Entry number 7, Team Columbiad.

"You there, ain't you with the Cannon Club?"

The leader was the bearded guy from Shiinoki Village, the Village of the Beech tree.

"N-, no, I have come here to work as a Mediator."

"We wanted to name ours the Cannon Club, too. It's a name with an ancient and noble origin."

"So we are that famous."

"Famous is famous. It's the team that Jules Verne, a famous astrophysicist of the ancient past, formed when he went to have an adventure on the moon."

"...was Jules Verne actually that?"

"There's that thing called Jules energy, yanno. It's said that he's the guy who discovered it.

Yeah, seriously, what incredible scholars there used to be."

"...a r e y o u s u r e ?"

I truly did not understand anymore.

"And this cannon aircraft we developed shares that name."

That was, among the ones I had seen so far, the aircraft that was most lacking in safety considerations. Or rather, that was purely a cannon and that was all.

"I would at least like to ask, but... what about something like a parachute?"

"Of course we got one! We don't want to die!"

"That is a relief to hear."

However, should the pilot fall in the open sea, the boat will first of all be unable to reach him.

This man will die free in the sky. He was that type of person, I was sure.

"I ain't ever losing to them Kusunoki Village. Tell 'em to get ready for it!"

The entry number order was most certainly not the zeal level order, but I was unable to find any other outstanding team past this one.

In short, it was natural to think that in this generation, there came to be many competitors who wanted to fly in the sky in the living flesh Plus Alpha.

The orthodox ones were the teams that used wings stuck to a bicycle or a glider.

As far as number I would say they were the majority.

It was a mix of good and bad, we had things that were little more than cardboard cutouts patterned after birds and full-sized fuselages with calculated aerodynamic characteristics.

The next major category were the personal portable flying devices.

The types were one wore the flying device on the body to fly in the sky.

Backpack-type flying devices, wings flapping with steam propulsion, plain large umbrellas, chairs with propellers attached, and there were even some participants that just wore a cape.

"T-, this is just a cape, what is it about?"

"Exactly! This is just a cape."

The really suited man wearing full-body tights and mask flapped his cape.

"What kind of flight principles does it use?"

"The ghost of an ancestor appeared to me in a dream and told me that I will become a flying ace. And me, I'm gonna fly. I heard of my ancestor's pride, of how my ancestor, far in the distant past, was a soldier of the skies. And me, I usually just paint houses, but the blood of a warrior courses through me. And me, I'm gonna fly!"

...and, well, that was sort of how it went.

Grandfather and the Cannon Club members were entry number 18.

I went to have a look just in case.

"The structural strength of the blades is totally different from the design, isn't it!"

"That's because you said we should be using balsa wood as main spindle, innit..."

"I said that 'cause we were going to use resin as coating!"

"Oi, ain't the calculations here odd? Looking at this, unless you develop 1.5 horsepower with human strength, you won't be able to achieve the necessary lift, won't you?"

"The hell are you bringing that up at this point, you idiot, you gone so senile you can't read the mood now!"

"You're also some old imbecile, ain't ya!"

"Look, we gotta use a tandem rotor here and—"

"Like we can do that at this point!"

Grandfather and the other two mischievous older men were in the midst of a large-scale verbal war.

Assistant-san the pilot waved a hand towards me from a corner of the garage.

...this was not the proper time, indeed.

As it did not look like I could join the conversation, I decided to leave the place.

As a result of my continued investigation, out of a total of thirty-two teams, teams whose pilots I feared would fall to their deaths during the contest... twenty-five. Teams whose pilots I feared would end up stranded and lost... seven.

I could have nothing but a bad feeling about this.

I compiled crisis management documents and went to advise the VIP boss regarding how to conduct a safety review.

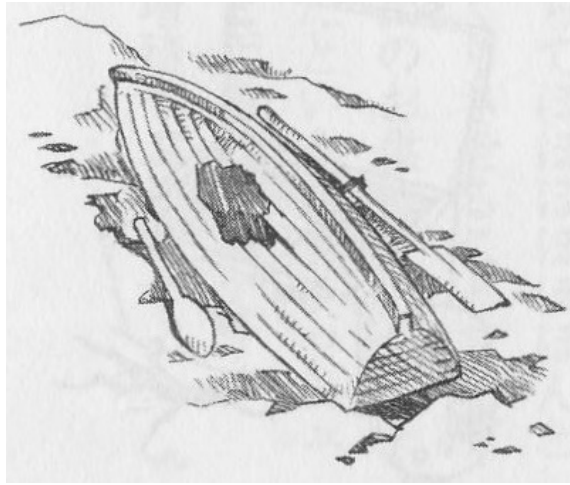
"That's bad, that's very bad, girl. Inspecting at this point will get criticism from everyone. It's gonna be a problem if they gotta retire! We got no devices that are forbidden from participating. We're not refusing those that come. Allow it to continue in fairness and prosperity. At your discretion."

And like a storm he went away.

"Bwah..."

I inspected the rescue boat.

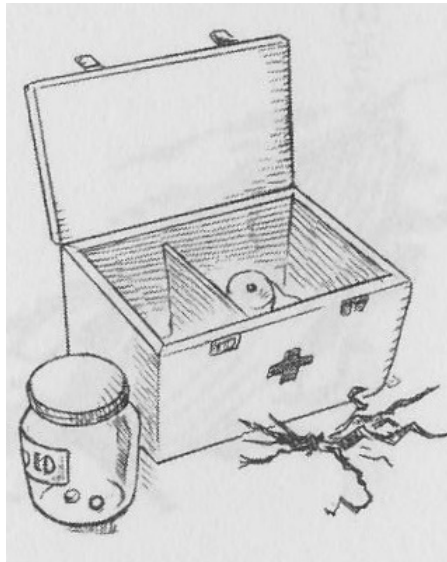
It was rotten and a hole in it.



Also it was missing one oar, instead it had a massive spoon.
"Bwaaah..."

I tried going to greet the doctor in charge of the rescue team.
"Hey, lady, is dinner still not done?"
"Bwaaah..."

I tried inspecting the contents of the emergency medical kit.



Cold medicine, bandages, and a bundle of rotten medicinal herbs.
"Bwaaaaaaaah..."

I went under the cape and my sharp eyes spotted local fishermen. I tried asking about the area's topography.
"From here all the way to open sea it's all reef. If a ship tries to come here it'll be the end right away for 'em. I heard this place was famous for being dangerous among those in the fishing

industry in the past."

"Then if they started rowing a boat out..."

"It's gonna sink, I bet."

"So, what about dangerous creatures in the sea."

"There's lots and lots."

It was clear that the dangerous side was a full-course service that left nothing to be desired.

The participating aircraft were all sure-breakdown in quality.

Emergency measures were insubstantial.

I heard this contest did not really have a defined period in which it was going to be held.

I believed they had had plenty of time.

"How did it end like this!"

I shouted at the sea.

I saw something that seemed to be a shark fin moving lively about in the open sea.

A contest for dying flying aces will be held soon—!

"C'mon!"

I tossed a colorful sphere I took out from my pouch and as it landed on the ground it made a series of comical pop-pop-pop-pop-pop-pop sound effects like popcorn. When fairies were startled they became rounded-up, just like pillbugs, and they were handy to carry around.

They came with me on trips and work outings.

The single fairy that had come back from being a rounded-up fairy was stimulated by being bounced on the ground, so the one became two, the two became four, and they promptly ended up increasing massively.

Perhaps having inferred that a festival was going to be held soon, they increased like wakame.

They increased in number when they were having fun.

And so, whenever I wanted peace to return, I only needed to leave them somewhere that was incredibly boring.

For example... right, on top of an open textbook.

But just for today, I believed we had a situation where the more, the merrier.

"Guys, are you well!"

The fairies responded to my voice that sounded desperate.

"I can't hold back already!" "Full throttle time!" "I wanna do it!" "We're persistent!"

It was good that they increased in number, I thought.

I wanted the whole area around me to be dyed in a flavor of fantasy.

Something like a sweet fairy tale, one that was not scary, one where there was no cutting off the feet to fit into shoes, no chasing siblings into the woods to reduce the number of mouths to feed...

"Today it is a free day for you all."

"Free?" "What's free?" "Liberté!" "Something you fight for and win?" "Like, wanting to freely ignore rules?" "Something like leaving us unchecked." "Might also mean chaos."

"It means you can use your powers more than normal."

"Oooh!"

The mysterious powers of the fairies were almost magical.

The more they increased, the more its effect increased.

"That said, only towards the things that I tell you. That is your job. Anyone want to do it!"

"I'll do it!" "I wanna do it!" "Lemme do it!"



Everybody was participating.

"The pay is sweets for three days."

Right then and there, pop-pop-pop-pop-pop-pop, the number of fairies increased. Cash greedy, huh... no, sweet greedy people.

"That is fine. Keep on increasing. Today we have a big job."

Dragged along as if by the Piper of Hamelin, the fairies quickly set off.

Underhanded trick to ensure people will not end up dead number 1:

total removal of the (dangerous) guys from the sea.

"Please beach all the creatures that look like they would attack humans in this area."

"Roger!"

First, the fairies gathered materials from here and there.

A Chinese frying pan, pebbles, trees, shoes with holes in them, dried leaves.

The fairies were moving around them like a movie in dizzying fast-forwards.

One minute passed and,

"Done?"

A mysterious secret tool had been completed.

"What exactly is this?"

A platform supported by a pot, and shoes bursting with some contraption inside. The two of them were connected by a cord (shoelaces?).

"A messed-up antenna."

"Messed up..."

"User's manual!"

The fairy explained how to use it.

First, point the pot's antenna towards where you want it to operate.

Next, you massage the shoes in order to activate the device (the reason why is unclear), then the pot's antenna started emitting No Good Waves called Messed Up Waves.

"The messed-up thing makes everyone messed up." "Friendship gets messed up." "Instinct gets messed up." "Bitter potatoes get messed up." "Memories get messed up." "Atoms get messed up."

"...is... it safe?"

"If you rub it right," he asserted with cutesy eyes.

"So, can you tell me how exactly should I rub it?"

"Make it feel good!" "Believe in yourself!" "Just think about 'oh nooo' things!"

"I see... so I do as always, try randomly to make it feel good."

"Feel good!" "Feel fine!"

I rubbed the shoes as I strongly wished,

(creatures that eat people and attack people and are poisonous... are no good!)

When I did, the antenna went *bwoooooh* and started vibrating. It looked like these messed-up waves or whatever were being fired towards the sea surface.

I saw the shark that had been leisurely swimming in the open sea panic and run away.

"My, it is effective. Farewell, cartilagenous fishes. Welcome, safety."

Given this, the other dangerous animals (for example man-eating super-poisonous starfishes) should also have run away.

"Waaah!" "They ran away!" "Bye bye food chain!" "Happily ever after?"

"This is a marvelous tool. I am impressed!"

And it was easy to use.

Being able to mess up the target that you wished for, really, it was quite easy to use.

"...huh? Could it be that...?"

I suddenly had an idea and pointed the antenna towards a boulder that was jutting out from the sea surface.

Then I wished strongly.

(Boulders are in the way!)

Bwoooooh, and as soon as the pot began shivering, the boulder exploded. It got pulverized.

"EeeeeEEEEK?!"

This was totally a weapon!!!

"That's now all messed up!," a fairy said that while giving me a face with no malice to it.

"Please do not say that so happily."

"Everything gets messed up!" "Every last thing gets messed up!" "Families gets messed up!"

"T-, this is something that absolutely must never be pointed towards people..."

"But if you feel like that, then it's fine?" "You massage the heart!" "With a soft heart!" "All messed up!"

"So it all depends on the person using it... what a relief that I noticed right away."

Using the powers of the fairies, humans could become gods as well as demons.

If I did not hold on to myself, then, even if the worst disasters could be avoided, this might worsen the situation in the most bizarre ways.

"Right. I have to do something about the reef, too."

"Mess it up?"

"No, it is far too large. Destroying boulders and messing up the environments would disturb the ecosystem and result in all sorts of bad effects, and it would be quite bad for the local people."

The fairies made a circle and began discussing.

Squeak, squeak, squeak. Should be called Fairy Talk, I suppose, because they spoke so quickly that that was all I heard. Not long afterwards, the representative came forwards.

"You can turn the boulders into conjac, what about?"

"Conjac?"

"Make them soft."

"I do not quite understand, but making them soft would be fine. A temporary device would be enough, as long as it lasts until the end of the contest."

The fairies once again scattered to gather materials.

And a few minutes later they came back.

Impressive how they could manage to build a machine with these materials.

"Show me exactly how you built it, please."

And then the fairies averted their faces in apparent embarrassment.

"...it's embarrassing."

"Why?"

I did not quite understand.

Regardless, the fairies moved about like gusts of wind and finished the tool in the blink of an eye.

"Cognac Conjac!" "Done!"

...I had this feeling that things were heading progressively towards a more easygoing direction, of late.

"What is this thing?"

What they had built was a device based around a tin can.

A cord extended from the tin can and connected to a stick with a nail.

"User's manual!"

The part with the nail should be put in the sea, and shaking the can activated it. According to the explanation, the functioning principle was that the emotions of wanting to give the conjac inside the can get transmitted from the nail to the sea.

"How should I shake this?"

"With a feeling like, dammit!" "If you shake it hard, there'll be lots of conjac!" "If you shake it a little, there'll be small conjac!"

"Hopefully the Earth will not turn into conjac if I make a mistake when shaking it..."

Of late I have been such that I left thinking about things becoming like that to if and when they became like that.

I shook the can and sunk the stick with the nail into the sea.

There were no changes that I could see. The sea surface swayed calmly.

I stretched my hands and tried touching a nearby boulder below the surface.

It was soft!

"This... is safe, I believe."

"It's all conjac!" "You can bump your head into it!" "But you won't die!" "You can even put it in a soup!" "It's low calorie!"

"Is this edible?"

I tried cutting off a slice of this reef turned conjac or whatever it was with a knife.

It was a terribly squishy and soft something.

They made a mistake and it resembled pudding.

I tried biting into it a little but it had no flavor. A tasty way of eating it I could think of was...

"Since it is low in calories, then what if I flavored it and turned it into jelly?"

"..." "..." "..." "..."

I had a feeling like a shadow was suddenly cast on the fairies' faces. Whatever else their expressions were unchanged, so they felt a fair bit diseased.

It was something like what happened when one's saddest memories were prodded...

And then the fairies, dejected, made a clicking sound as they turned into spheres one after another.

"Was it that sad an event...?"

The Earth of the past was harsh.

The problem of the reef and the matter of the sharks were for the time being solved.

That said, there were still things that needed to be taken into account.

The next morning, after the night broke into day, I once again called out the fairies.

"We must do something about the rescue boat and the doctor. After that, what awaits is to individually deal with each aircraft that I have concluded to be certain to crash."

"There's so many things to do, it's so much fun!"

"We gotta do this spit-spot or we will not have time. The contest begins tomorrow."

If I we do not arrive at a complete solution of all the problems before tomorrow, there will be blame to go around.

"As for the boat, everything aside the aging is an issue. In this land, fishing has long since been abandoned, so there is nearly no one that can use this and there is no changing that, but... we need to deal with it within the day. Therefore, I want you to change it into a highly functional rescue boat!"

What we were looking for was, if possible, for the possibility of the rescue boat to keep up

with the flying machines.

As a little bit of reckless driving had to be expected, I was ready to try that.

"Next, we have to solve the problem of that old doctor with mist on his eyes..."

One of the fairies in the row raised his hand.

"What do we do?"

"We should solve all these problems at once, that is what I am saying."

"Right."

"...normally this is where you hesitate, but... OK!"

Do it, do it. Get it done in three minutes.

The fairies went *waaah!* and rushed to the rotten boat.

Thunk-thunk-thunk-thunk rumble-rumble-rumble-rumble creak-creak-creak bonk-bonk-bonk-bonk!

And with those loud noises, the rebuild progressed.

I did not even have time to drink a cup of tea before it was finished, the process advanced that swiftly and recklessly. And that was why I decided to feign ignorance with regards to how the shape of the boat was no longer that of a ship.

"Done!"

"Bwah, it looks like a submarine."

The boat had been turned into a sealed vehicle like a solidified tear drop set on its side.

"But it is fine, too, a submarine. They can easily rescue any sinking pilots."

"It works!"

"Then it is all fine, just with this thing... if they get suspicious, I will say I just happened to find it on the beach..."

If I insist that it was lost technology, things will be filed away just like that.

"Wanna ride it a bit?" "Master human, this is an invitation!"

"Are we going to come back right away?"

"Yes!"

Then I supposed it was fine, and as I entered inside the submarine from the trapdoor I found that they had set up one seat for humans and several dozen tiny seats for the fairies.

I was sitting in the captain's seat. The fairies lined around an U-shaped console as they took their places.

"Sooo, let us have one lap around the coastal waters, please. This is a test ride. Make sure not to head into the Marianas Trench if you make any mistakes. Only coastal waters, please, coastal waters."

"We kinda get it?"

But as I said that, the next instant,

"Warp!"

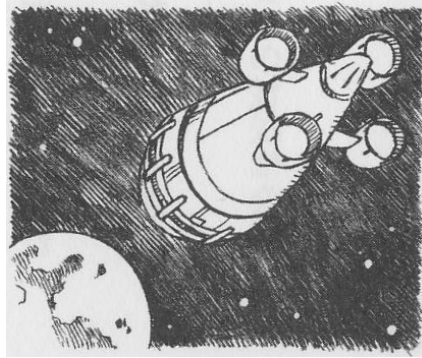
"...huh?"

The boat floated into outer space.

"EeEEEEEEK! This is not what I wantEEEEED?!"

There was no gravity, my internal organs felt like they were squirming and I felt sick.

"I said only coastal wateEEEEERS!!!"



"These are the coastal waters of the third planet of the solar system, Earth."

"We cannot go out in the ocean that is spaaaaAAAce!"

The fairies piloted the ship and the rescue boat floated back onto the sea.

"Was that a dream? I saw a blue star..."

"That was our Mother Earth!"

"Our dearest and noblest mother I wanted to only meet in pictures..."

In the end, we decided to sink the boat into the sea.

"This is a flying ace contest, what do we do if the rescue boat flies off before them?"

With no other option, I made honest rounds of the local farmers with a bicycle, asked, and managed to borrow a better boat.

There was also a man in a different farmer family that had learned medicine, so I could solve that problem at last.

It was that time at night when the stars were finally becoming visible.

A bit of a festival had begun in the square adjacent to the contest village.

They had set up stalls, there were people showing off art and the like, and before them there was a coming and going of the participants, the people accompanying them, and also of spectators, all with happy strides.

Steamed potatoes, roasted sweet bread, candies on sticks and more were given as treats to everybody without restraint, and though it was clear that they were plain decorations set up hastily, the flags of all the countries and the electric lights overhead gave this all a festive mood.

In that noisy air there was a suspicious person passing past the garage area with a tense face... which was me.

Whatever else, I still had serious problems that I had to deal with left.

"Awww, so it is actually not empty, I see..."

When I made it to the storehouse area and noticed that, I could not hide my disappointment.

In the garages on this day before the contest there were still many many staff personnel continuing their work.

Considering the time, there was no sign anyone was sleeping.

There were plenty of teams continuing their work through the night.

There were some groups among them that were still assembling their vehicles.

If only there had been no one around, this situation would not be at its worst...

There was only one thing I could do.

To walk to them as they were in the midst of their frantic work, declare "that vehicle is a little bit dangerous, please let me work on it so people will not die," gain their ready consent, have

a genius-like flash of inspiration, show off advanced technological engineering, and in the blink of an eye install safeties without the slightest impact on craft design and airlift calculations... that was the job.

For the sake of doing that, there were skills I needed.

An ability to negotiate such that I could settle anything pacifically no matter the verbal abuse I received.

Specialized knowledge and experience in flying aircraft.

Extraordinary engineering skills.

Sigh... I could practice a hundred years and this would still be out of my league.

"Wanna split into groups?"

Next to the building, in the darkness where no people would see, the sole and only choice with no other proposed that.

"No... I believe we should just stop..."

It was hard for the fairies to act when there were many people they did not know around, and it was possible that the people who spotted them would start making noise about them.

First of all, fairies let loose were as dangerous as aircraft that had never been tested in flight.

The work I had to do myself, even if it took time.

I had to ensure the safety of the aircraft in ways that no one would nag about, and in ways such that the people involved with them would not notice.

And to do that...

"Please lend me all the tools that you can."

"Yeees!"

"I would prefer tools that solved problems before they happened."

"Ah-yeah!"

"Also a tool that allows prompt escapes in moments of trouble, a tool that allows me to dodge questioning, and..."

I made plenty of orders.

In the end, a lot of tools were piled up before my eyes.

"Uhm, there appears to be many that I did not request, however.

"An interpretative mistake?"

As each individual fairy had made each their individual tool with regards to each individual request, there were product overlaps.

"First of all, what exactly is this?"

I received explanations for each individual tool.

As they were things the fairies made there were many that did not seem useful as they would only multiply the problems, but I spotted several that seemed like they would be useful if used correctly.

"This, and this, and this, and then this too... these I will borrow, these are dangerous so I will give them back to you."

I shoved back the ones that looked like they would complicate the situation.

If I used those and caused confusion that could not be laughed off we would have a Fairy-Tale Level Disaster, and my responsibility would come to be put into question.

"Come, I have received some cookies from the stalls, there are many so play nice and share them among yourselves, please."

"Waaah!" "Crunchy-crunchies!" "I adore them!" "Thank you for the food!"

Once they were properly distracted, I pulled out a party cracker and pulled the cord.

There was a sharp sound, the cracker blew up, and all the fairies turned into balls.

Silence and chilliness returned to the darkness.

"...good."

"Who are you." "Talking to?"

"Wah?!"

The twins were standing behind me.

"I- I am not doing anything, you see?"

"You were talking." "With someone."

"I-, I was talking to myself."

"What are those?" "Toys?"

"They are veeery dangerous. They are dangerous, so no touching."

I pushed the mountain of tools behind my back as I stepped backwards.

"What happened with your brother?"

"He's making the aircraft." "We got trouble."

"And you do not need to help him...?"

"He said we can't touch it." "That we should go play." The voices of the two matched. "Wanna play?"



"Uhhmm, well... I still have a bit of work to do, so... farewell!"

I picked up the big armful of tools and made like a fleeing rabbit.

The twins had their jaws agape as they stood stock still on the spot.

...my apologies. Please deliver any complaints to the UN Secretariat.

A suspicious figure rampaged through the garage area at night.

It was engaging in all manners of suspicious behavior.

That suspicious person moved from garage to garage, from aircraft to aircraft, avoiding people's eyes.

As for what was suspicious, its outward looks were odd.

It had a mask and a cape as well as a top hat.

It was all dyed in black, seemingly so that it could walk about the night.

In other words, the looks of a thief. An uniform that prioritized privacy made in full knowledge that it would be suspicious.

It was a look that would make anyone go *oh dear, this person is sort of off* the instant they were witnessed.

I say this as the person herself who was wearing it, so there was no mistake.

Now then, having become a phantom thief, I used my thieving skills to infiltrate the now

deserted garages.

The boots that the fairies made for me completely erased footsteps.

Plain, but useful.

Its original goal was to startle people by approaching them with no sound when worn, it was perverted.

"This... is team Schwalbel, right."

The restored jet plane was majestically displayed in the center of the space.

Right next to it there stood that man who also was the pilot with his stern face.

He had opened the ventral hatch and had his arms inside it, so it seemed it was still undergoing adjustments.

And there—

I took out the wind-up tool of the fairies, the time stop watch.

"It will only stop the target's time... or will it, really."

There was nothing to do but use it and see.

I pushed the watch's button.

And there, something like a needle shot out at high speeds from a hole in the outer rim of the clock.

As soon as it struck his neck, the jet guy fell fast asleep.

It was nothing more than a watch-shaped tranquilizer gun.

I approached the aircraft.

Next I used the mask. It was also a fairy tool.

Using the mask's function made a skull sign show up in the areas that could cause problems.

There were just five large skull signs stuck to the jet.

On the engines at the side, at the root of the wings where they were attached, and near the center of the fuselage.

What it meant was clear and just as I had predicted, it was Crash Quality.

"This... the instant it starts flying it will fall apart."

And then it would explode in midair. The chance that the pilot would survive was less than one percent.

I took out the Solution Suit instruction manual.

I referenced the Q&A Corner. This was what there was written.

Q: There's lots of skulls, what do I do?

A: Poke them! Poke them!

Fairy instructions were so simple they were hard to understand.

But I was used it them.

"...so I should just use this?"

The sword I was wearing was a Solution Saber.

It was a saber pointing-type auto-repairer that solved problems and repaired the source of damages wherever it was pointed at.

Interpreting the manual, this was going to be what I needed to do.

"Now then."

I took out the saber, pointed it at one of the skulls that the mask was showing, went *ey'yah!* and visited it with a single strike. Promptly, one of the skulls shattered like a glass pane.

"So, is it fixed?"

I had no way of making sure. I just calmly poked the other skulls.

The instant I fixed all five, something that was not of my will made my vocal cords and left hand shake.

The strong voice that reverberated in the pit of my stomach went...

"Re☆Solved! (sideways peace sign)"

...now what was that about?

I had only been controlled for an instant.

It appeared that the saber was made so that, after it was used, I would automatically say that.

"Still, it appears the skulls are gone."

The frame of the jet was shining so brightly it was hard to recognize.

It felt like its skin tone had returned.

It looked like repairs had been completed successfully.

This was going to fly, my instincts said.

With this, the problems at team Schwalbel were solved.

"This... is quite convenient."

Though belatedly, I was impressed.

The safety initiative continued under cover of the night.

Team Birdman.

"Bwaaah, we got a pink elephant here!" "It's true! He's pink!" "Look, the pink elephant's climbing a skyscraper!" "Wow, this here's one serious show!"

The instant the people of team Birdman were bathed in the secret tool spray solution Cloudy Eyes, they all began having hallucinations.

All of those who were bathed in Cloudy Eyes would have their eyes fail to work.

Incidentally, the pink elephant some were talking about was the faded number 09 written on one of the external walls of the garage.

Their nonsensical aircraft was so dangerous it had countless tiny skulls over it.

Seeing them stuck around the axles of each individual wing I had a feeling that they would bend to one side, that kind of problem.

I shattered them without a single one left behind, mending it into a safe aircraft.

"Re☆Solved! (sideways peace sign)"

Team Hot Air Balloon showed only one skull.

So it was a simple problem, I wanted to say, but it was the opposite.

It was not a normal white skull, it was warning red, which I understood as a symbol that a serious flaw was concealed in the depths.

The mask did not show specific details of the dangers, either.

An air balloon would not be in danger of suddenly falling to the ground when launched or anything.

Thinking about it, it was more likely it was going to escape human control and fly to the farthest sides of the sea and the sky... or something.

The depth of the problem was seemingly represented by the hardness of the skull, because even thrust at, it did not show a single trace of chipping or damage on it.

"Times like these, I need this."

I used the construction type drill, which had more destructive power, sorry, resolute power than the saber.

When turned on it made a very loud sound.

I suppose that was normal, being a drill.

Its unsophisticated cone, which even looked like it belonged in a construction site, exchanged loud sounds for destructive power, sorry, resolute power, and shattered the red skull in a short amount of time.

"Bwaaaah! Who are you! What are you doing to our poor aircraft!"

Then, well, the people came back.

"Please wait. I am not breaking it. I am fixing it."

The man had gone to have a little drink, and as he returned in good humor to look at things he found an unknown and suspicious person brandishing a massive drill, anybody who happened upon a situation like that would have the same and expected response.

"THIEEEEEEEF!"

"Tsk!"

I bathed him in Cloudy Eyes.

"HyGyyyh!"

The man screamed out and rolled on the floor. Looked like it stung a little.

"Calm down, sir. This is not a drill. It is a watering can."

"Oooh, now that I look at it, you're right! I'm sorry, it looks like I made a mistake."

"When I passed by I saw that the air balloon was withering, so I was watering it."

"So that's what it was! After all, that balloon is really like a potted plant, so it's necessary to water it frequently, right," the man massaged his beaming face. "Thank you, miss passerby."

I went in order.

I further Re☆Solved! (sideways peace sign) the problems at team DaVinci, team Mouse, and team Columbiad, like a cog in a machine that was well beyond rewarding me with anything.

But I was more than a mere cog in a machine.

I talked all proud, but neither DaVinci's pioneering helicopter nor Mouse's glider had any significant problems. They were a vehicle with low flying capabilities and a very safe glider to begin with, so the probability they would be involved in a serious accident was also low.

The safety I gave to these aircraft was nothing more than guaranteeing they will not fly out of control in the worst case scenarios.

I had trouble with Columbiad.

There were three red skulls.

As expectable from an explosive flying device, the danger was also explosive.

...this was no laughing matter.

Even the drill was not strong enough to shatter those robust and massive red skulls.

And there I took out the item I possessed with the most destructive power, sorry, resolute power, the Diodic Blasting type auto-repairer.

Setting down the blasting power in alternation, drag force can be expected to provide a decisive destructive power... or so it was written in the book.

We do this.

"3, 2, 1... explosion!"

The blast thundered throughout the whole of the garage area.

It was perfect.

"D'waaaaah! What the hell is this! Why's nothing destroyed!"

I escaped before being found.

Having cleared out the more problematic teams I went with the flow and finished the job quickly.

There were practically no problems with the rest of the jobs.

As a trend, the glider types were overall safe.

Although it was necessary to work to prevent aircraft with excessively short wings, brittle frames, or cardboard mock-ups from falling, they were the exceptions, because with regards to the aircraft that were in the Safe group I only needed to ensure that they would not fly too far, it was all red tape work.

The portable personal flying devices had the highest chaoticness, and the impression I got from the mask was nothing short of a serial suicide show.

Now that the reef had been turned into marshmallow there was no real fear of accidents, so there were little more than ping pong ball-sized skulls here and there.

The sole and only impressive one was the deuterium plasma drive research laboratory, which, as expected from something with the dignity of a professional job, did not have one single skull. The saucer, surrounded by tuning equipment, was shining silver like it was reflecting even my complaints.

I felt respect for it.

As for Grandfather's team, the Kusunoki Cannon Club, it had a wooden bicycle in the center with rotor arms extending in the four directions, packed with gears and machinery in between, at a glance it reminded me of an overgrown planter, it was a massive, heretical machine. Size was nearly the same as a jet craft.

Making that fly with manpower could be called nothing else but a bold challenge towards reality.

From outside the garage I stared at Grandfather and Assistant-san, who had changed into work clothes at some point and was helping him, continue to adjust the machine.

I could not be spotted as Miss Re☆Solve.

I tried activating the mask and was surprised to find that there was not a single one of those skulls that indicated danger.

No, it was rare, but... I activated the far-sight mode of the mask and found that there were white skulls of a few centimeters in size appearing and disappearing in spots here and there, which I inferred were the effect of the adjustments.

Unless it flew too far, it would not crash.

It was a courageous design, which lowered weight as much as possible and faced the contest on grounds of minimum viable sturdiness. It might have been quite the nice thing, perhaps.

In the end, I had no objections about the Kusunoki Cannon Club, so I left the garage behind. I hoped that they would see appropriate results for their hard work.

I changed costume in some thicket where no one passed by and exhaled a sigh of relief.

The costume was a Fairy Item, so once folded it turned into a capsule. I put it in my pocket and found that my fingertips hit something of a cold bottle. Wondering what it was, I took it out.

"So in the end, I did not use this, indeed..."

It was the Secret Tool, Good Walking Drink.

It was a drink medicine that multiplied leg strength tenfold, making escape much faster.

It was the only thing I had left.

It was of course too unsafe to open it up after the job was done, so I put it back in my pocket and started thinking about tomorrow's work.

And still.

A head-to-head contest between a human powered helicopter and a bird-shaped cardboard and a water bottle rocket and a jet fighter and a flying saucer and a human projectile cannon

was, to say it, not quite the appropriate event for Earth at the moment, was it not.
In the past, humanity had even gone into space.
We no longer knew how.
And so it was nearly impossible to accurately know which generation each of these resurrected aircraft techniques had come from.
And this event was about putting together one's chosen flight technology and seeing how it stacked up, all while knowing that.
At the end of things, this contest was not a fight on how far one flew or how long they stayed in the air, but a game of romance.
As I looked up at the moon, I seriously thought that.

Dawn came to the day of the contest.
Once the day had come, there were still crowds of spectators jostling about, so the hills on the sides of the cape had sightseeing zones that were just grass cut short and used as seats, all of which were filled to the brim with people.
"How is it, lady. Looking at all these people, don't you think so?"
There was a commenter's seat set up next to the cape.
At the moment nobody was sitting there, and before it there was Mister VIP with a satisfied smile on his face.
"Huh, think about what?"
"That you just want to cheer them on?"
"..."
I had no words.
"So, are safety checks all done?"
I wanted to jump into the sea.
That was the feeling that stirred up in me when he said that.
"It is all done."
I will now give a summary explanation of the contest schedule.
The participating aircraft were going take flight from a platform that jutted out significantly from the edge of the cape and head towards the sea. Flight distance was judged through the difference between the platform and splash landing.
Taking safety into account, the course proceeded not towards open sea but along the coastline.
Should they go past the supposed distance limit, the horse riding squad that rode alongside them was to warn them to pull back via bullhorn, and they would then return to the side platform.
In the unlikely event they went into the open sea, the rescue team would be dispatched with a boat.
The problem was that the boat lacked machine parts and did not even have a motor.
The oars?
They were not quite useful.
...I had taken steps to give more of an insurance to things, which was a good thing, but that was top secret information that I did not have to tell the Mister.
Of course, I avoided making references to the devices that turned the reef and the wave-breaking blocks soft, exterminated dangerous creatures, and installed safeties in the aircraft.
The unnecessary inquisitiveness of my superiors had to be stifled.
So long as I did not report things I did not need to, I was unlikely to receive unnecessary

blowbacks.

That being said, if anything were to happen I would be unable to avoid being accused of having made a mistake...

Ten AM, same day.

Standing before the participants gathered in the square, Mister VIP gave a brief speech and a large number of fireworks were shot up. A siren thundered from somewhere.

The Flying Ace Contest had begun—

"Commentary we'll leave to Professor S of the Cannon Club from Kusunoki Village."

"Ahhh, thank you very much."

The announcement came from the mike in the commentator seat.

I spurted out with full force the orangeade that I was drinking in the stead of breakfast behind the platform.

"First competitor, team Missile Boy. It's the shouldered type, what is it exactly?" asked the judge.

"It's something like a rocket. It's primitive technology, but it's all that's needed to have an easy flight, I could say. It's just that there's nearly no way to control it, and it's also got a fuel limit, so I can't really expect to stay in the air for long..."

Mister Team Missile Boy ran off the platform with his own feet.

He then pulled a cord, the rocket ignited, and he took a dive from the edge!

He fell! A spectacular fall!

"Oooh, this looks like an ignition failure!"

"Looks like their engineering was to blame. Let's look forwards to the next one."

The boat creaked loudly as it went to pull up the fallen competitor.

As the reef had turned into a gummy-like substance, it seemed he was not injured.

"I thought I had removed all the skulls... it is odd... or rather, it is not."

The skulls that showed danger and the flying capabilities of each of the aircraft were separate, indeed.

Besides, just falling downwards was nothing problematic.

"Next competitor... team Poppins. This is an umbrella, I see."

"Yup. It's a giant umbrella. It's custom made, of course."

"I feel rude to ask, but how exactly is an umbrella going to work as an aircraft?"

"Well, see... the umbrella resembles a parachute, so structurally it's not too strong when it comes to rising up from below."

"Sure is, it's not uncommon for umbrellas to get turned inside out in strong winds."

"And how to get over that was one of our problems. As long as we can catch some good wind, even a little bit, that would certainly make our falling speed drop."

The second competitor fell into the water, umbrella and all, at about the same speed as a free fall.

Laughter came from the venue.

The third competitor went up the platform.

He was wearing some kind of walker with a large number number of bottles attached.

"This competitor is bringing in something that looks a little overdone. What is that, professor?"

"They're water bottles. They got water under pressure in them. Opening the bottles all at once makes water jet out, achieving flight. It's a simple and interesting design. An enterprise with a high level of romance. I really hope it's going to fly."

"But what happens when the water runs out?"

"Same as with a rocket. With no propellant, it'll fall."

"It's questionable whether it's gonna fly that far with just water."

"Well, there's no need to ridicule it. It's just that the attitude control is as difficult as it looks, and once the balance is lost, it's hard to regain. Popping all those many bottles simultaneously requires specialized technologies."

"Oooh, the flying device of team Water Bottles uses three hundred three-liter water bottles, I see."

The water bottles all spurted out as one.

The participant, clad in something that seemed ridiculous, lightly floated in the air and loud cheers came from the venue.

"Team Water Bottles! Incredible, they rose up to a height of ten meters in an instant! Their flight distance was short and in the end they fell down, but that was really the surprising event, wasn't it, professor!"

"Indeed. It was really impressive. I believe it's gonna give the following contestants a run for their money. They had a parachute installed as safety device, that was a good thing."

"I see. Now then, it's time for a pick-up interview."

The bottles contestant could not conceal his perplexity from across the mike.

"Well, we apparently added a parachute, I guess? I don't remember that, but... I suppose there was a teammate or someone who was mindful about things. Thanks to that, I'm completely unhurt..."

People who might have been severely injured without the aid of the fairies were extremely confused.

There was certainly one tiny skull stuck to the water bottle device.

As a result of solving it, this was what happened. Still.

"It... sort of looked more dangerous than I thought."

I honestly did not think it would fly that high.

With that one exception, the contestants all failed...

Right, I worried overmuch.

I had belittled it. Humanity's passion for Romance, that was.

It was a disease of the heart comparable to bad things such as the Black Plague.

Unbelievable that they would try to fly using water bottles.

While I could say that removing the skull repaired it, what could not fly would still not fly.

It was just a treatment to remove danger before it happened.

It would not have increased intrinsic flight capabilities.

In the end, would removing the skull solve all their problems?

And that was why I once again took the sword in hand.

I wore the mask and the hat, flapped my cape, and Re☆Solved everything.

"We have a hero here!" "How cool!"

I was spotted from behind.

"This you should never tell anyone."

"Why?" "What's the problem?" The voices of the two matched. "You're a hero!"

Four lively columns of water welled up behind my back.

"I am a Dark Hero."

"If you're a Dark Hero then there's nothing to be done!" "That's what being Dark is about!" The two continued speaking with no logical reasoning.

"Can we go with you?"

"..."

A fifth water pillar went splaaash in the strained silence.

And then I—

"She ran away!" "She ran away!"

I did not believe the two teensy ones would have any reasons, but they were so curious they chased me earnestly.

"Next up, team Schwalbel. What can you say about this team, professor?"

"Hum. They're truly impressive. They're on the bleeding edge of Romance. We built the platform sturdy for that purpose, so I want to see a good show from them."

"I know you're competing as the Kusunoki Cannon Club, professor, so how are you finding them as rivals?"

"Well now. If team Schwalbel's machine is really properly done, we're probably never going to win. But if there's anything their vehicle lacks, we'll have a chance to win... that's about it. But it's not about winning or losing. If Schwalbel succeeds in their flight, that would be by itself something that makes my heart dance. I really can't wait to see it."

A commentary that really did not consider how his granddaughter was breaking her back behind the stage could be heard from anywhere in the venue.

"Now then, it looks like they're about ready to take flight."

As I was running along the coast, chased by the two teensy ones, I gazed with the corner of my eyes the jet aircraft that was about to fly. Below the wings on its sides hung two engines. Those were the spots where the danger skull showed up. The parts where the wings connected and the engines. Serious problems were going to arise in those. An explosion. The wings breaking off. A crash landing.

And that was exactly what happened.

The engine turned on, a terrible sound caused a reaction that resembled a scream from the guest seats, the aircraft nimbly slid across the runway, turned into these five parts and flew in the sky.

- ① Frame
- ② Right wing
- ③ Left wing
- ④ Right engine
- ⑤ Left engine

And those five parts...

The frame took flight, meaning the wings had not initially come off.

That poor frame was yanked by its engines and fired off as if by a slingshot.

But of course it had jet propulsion, so even if the frame lost propulsive power, it still flew for several hundred meters on that momentum.

Likely as a result of my messing about behind the scenes, we at least avoided the worst tragedy, which was the engines exploding.

The canopy flew off and the pilot ejected out in the air with his seat. And then the parachute opened.

Mr. Jet was glancing about restlessly at the emergency escape device he had no memory of installing.

"Where are you going!" "Wait up!"

I stopped for a moment and the twins caught up with me.

I was not getting anywhere.

"I apologize, but we are done playing tag."

I took out one black bead from the pill case hanging around my breast. I placed it above my head.

The seed took root in an instant, and just as they looked I grew a flower, and it began revolving.

There were two layers of petals, and they each revolved in opposite direction, canceling the counter-torque, and allowing me to escape by flying away.

These Flowercopters, which grew in an instant once planted, had been selectively bred across a short period of time.

They were augmented by human senses, so they allowed normal flight.

"Huh?" "She got away?"

They were a forbidden tool that could shatter the feelings of they who would be aviators.

I went up in the air unnoticed, ensuring I was not found by the twins.

As visible from the thing with the jet plane, it appeared that the worst calamities were for the time being successfully prevented.

"I keep telling you, the horsepower calculations gotta be wrong."

The three Cannon Club professors were arguing around the human powered helicopter out in the area around the platform.

"What is going on?"

I talked to Assistant-san, who was waiting by the side (I took off my disguise first).

"..."

"Huh? They concluded that it will not fly using human power despite being human powered?"

At this point?"

Assistant-san nodded.

Though slight, disappointment seeped on his face, energetic ever since he started living in the Village.

"That... I can sympathize with."

It was easy to fly by asking the fairies.

Easy, but being a woman I had no Romance, it seemed.

"We're not participating until we fix flight preparations," went Grandfather.

"And still, yeah. The horsepower output by humans is at most 0.3 HP. But as it happened we made a mistake in the calculations, unless we actually output 1.5 HP, we can't keep up," went old man B.

"All three of us made the same mistake," went old man C.

"What do we do? Do we put off participating?"

"If we make last minute adjustments..."

"No matter how hard we try that's impossible. We can't remanufacture things, and besides, the level that we need redesigning for is..."

"Anyway, I gotta go back to the commentator's seat..."

It appeared that the participation had a forewarning of despair.

"..."

"Do not mind."

I put a hand on Assistant-san's shoulder.

Well, it was a dangerous contest, so it was more or less a relief that he would not participate.

"Right, I will give you this instead. Just one..."
A Flowercopter seed.
I could not feel the pill case in my pockets.
"Huh? I was sure it was here..."
I thought I had put it there, but it was not.
All I could think about was that I had dropped it.
But where?

"Team Birdman, flying the Birdman! All the wings have now bent! They're falling, they're falling... and splash landing! Looks like the pilot's just about safe. Now, next up—"

The contest continued without trouble.

At the moment, there was not a single team that had managed long-range flight.

Nor were there any significant accidents.

Feeling that a weight had been taken off my shoulders, I surveyed the contest from a grassy slope a little bit away from the spectator seats.

"Yah, young lady. Thanks for your work the other day."

It was the third and eldest brother who talked to me.

"Ah, it was nothing."

"That's what Mediation is about."

"Yes, well." The eldest brother was wearing a flight suit. And that was when I noticed. "...uhm, when is it going to be your turn?"

"Soon. Ah, did you spot my siblings around here?"

I did, were words that I swallowed on the spot.

"Have they disappeared?"

"Yes, it's about time, so I wanted them to come back, but... it's odd, they're not so young that they'd get lost."

"What about using the announcer? They have a reception in that yellow tent, you see?"

"Ahhh, that's a good idea. I'll give it a go right away. Thank you!"

Their team was Wright Brothers.

It used human powered propellers that employed the strengths of all three pilots.

Thinking about efficiency they should have had only one pilot, but there was no Romance in that, of course.

With a stout design, it could support the weight of three people, and now danger was just almost impossible to detect.

That was why Re☆Solving was not necessary.

Not long after, an announcement of someone searching for people came from the speakers.

A machine like a casket with working wings headed from the platform towards the sea, plummeted, and fell.

Water pillar.

"Sorry, team Flying Coffin, but your record is 9.4 meters. Lots of these flapping wings attached on that machine there."

"It's a type called an ornithopter. It's a general term for aircrafts that have working wings that replicate the construction of birds. With this type of flying device, the lighter they are, the more efficient they get. To the point that if they were ultra-small and unmanned, a single elastic band would be enough to make them fly for a long time. Any who wish for the sky ought lay their hands on a small scale ornithopter like this."

Grandfather had already returned to the commentator seat.

"So it becomes more complicated when it's manned, of course."

"Powerful motive power is going to make it possible, still, in order to have something that uses just human power there's nothing to do but to wait for a technological breakthrough, I believe. Human power has to pursue efficiency above all else, thus ending up having to use stronger, fixed wings, but there's no dream there. I hope all the challengers that come up from here onwards hope to resolutely explore a variety of possibilities."

"Thank you very much. Uhhh, now, next, the deuterium propellant drive research laboratory. The aircraft's name is the Adamski. This is a team to watch. This is what we're hearing from off in the field."

"This is Entry Zone. I am going to give a pre-flight interview! How enthusiastic are you all?"

The lady reporter pointed a microphone to the boy in a white robe standing next to the silver saucer.

Clever mister white robe of the research lab that had spearheaded the deuterium plasma drive research opened his closed eyes wide and declared this.

"As our propulsion device is incomplete, the deuterium plasma drive research lab retires from participation in the contest."

".....huh?"

"The craft is complete, and work for the engine's implementation is heading towards completion at a fast rate, but once we revised the fundamental theories, it became clear that turning deuterium into plasma was impossible to begin with. It's regrettable, but this time we can only try not to cry."

"...ohhh, there are so many things in this world... but let's regain our footing and introduce the next team, Light Blazers. There's three siblings participating. The aircraft is already on standby on the platform, it's called the Van der Graaf Zeppelin. Light Blazers, with aircraft Van der Graaf Zeppelin."

When I saw that aircraft my jaw nearly dislocated.

No, the aircraft itself was a human-powered propeller type, that was not odd.

The problem was that above the aircraft's fixed wings there grew a bunch of Flowercopters. The cheering from the spectator seats made the eldest brother and the twins wave their hands in return.

The interviewer approached with microphone in hand.

"What sort of beautiful flowers are blooming up there?"

"Ah, right. I just noticed them earlier, even I was surprised."

The eldest brother answered with a wry smile.

"It was us!" "We planted the seeds!" the two synchronized. "They bloomed right away!"

"Since we came this far, we're gonna wear these flowers like a cape and head for the skies."

I quietly took out just the mask and inspected the Van der Graaf Zeppelin... there was a supermassive platinum skull shining brightly on it.

Danger ranking... platinum > red > white.

"Something dangerous is going to happen..."

Given it was nothing more than a propeller powered by three people, the lift that the countless Flowercopters would generate could make them head for the heights of Mount Everest.

It seemed that the pill box that I dropped was picked up by the teensy ones.

This was no situation I could ignore.

"Please wait before you fly!"

The shout I gave in a panic as I approached the platform was in vain, as the aircraft took off.

"Awww..."

Everything seemed fine in the beginning.

The wings took wind and stretched taut, supporting the craft without folding.

It was like seeing parents holding a child's hands at his sides.

But the Van der Graaf Zeppelin unmistakably floated of its own power. Until it happened.

One of the Flowercopters began spinning.

Their roots perhaps worked together, as they started rotating one after another.

"Now what's all this? The Van der Graaf Zeppelin is rising up high!"

In the beginning there were cheers from the spectator seats.

But gradually, the ratio of worried voices increased.

"You're going too high, Van der Graaf Zeppelin! Are you having trouble!"

Right then, red smoke began leaking from the Van der Graaf Zeppelin.

It was an emergency flare.

They could no longer control the craft.

"Nooo! We have troubleeeeeee!"

Mister VIP's smile collapsed.

"This is real bad. Is there no aircraft that can go that high? Anyone who can rescue the pilots, at least?"

Grandfather's voice came from the speakers, but there was no one either among the teams in wait nor those who were done with the contest who could assist.

"Our cannon can make it!"

Team Columbiad, on standby, put themselves forwards.

However...

"A cannon, huh... that's too dangerous. It's not going to be good if that thing hits..."

"...!"

Assistant-san resolutely raised his hand.

Grandfather didn't even speak, he just shook his head.

The machine was not complete. Assistant-san too knew that only too well.

That moment, an electric shock went past my brain.

In my pockets I had the fairy drink, the Good Walking Drink.

It multiplied leg power tenfold—

I stared at the human powered helicopter, with no rider and its rotor blades dangling towards the ground as if wilting.

The necessary leg power was 1.5 HP—

One human was worth 0.3HP.

Multiplied by ten that was 3 HP, double the required amount.

"...a Mediator always puts their body on the line, huh."

It was as per usual.

However, this time it was literally seeds I had sown.

I sighed just once and that improved my mood.

I hid myself from the platform and changed into Resolution mode, gulping down the drink in one go.

My legs felt so hot they seemed like water bottles.

Just a light jog and ba-bwhoom, the scene slide past me.

This was more than merely fast.

...I was going.

I ran like Hermes in between the people, went past them, and on towards the human powered helicopter.

Acquaintances passed past before me, so I pulled the emergency brakes.

My eyes met with Assistant-san's nearby.

His eyes opened wide in a bit of surprise.

But that only lasted the blink of an eye.

Assistant-san smiled and spread his arms wide, pointing at the human powered helicopter.

"...sorry."

It was not like he did not feel unrewarded for the hard work.

I clambered over the wooden saddle, thin perhaps in order to reduce weight, and reeled back from the amount of wooden instruments on the wooden panel in between the handles.

I did not understand any of this!

A white finger came from above my shoulder and easily slid above that unintelligible panel.

"My, it is you...!"

There was only one seat, but there was something like a foothold for a second passenger behind me.

Assistant-san rode on it and put his hands on my shoulder.

"It would help if you could make it easy to understand, though."

Suddenly I made a smile, stared at the great wide sky that was certain to be past the platform, and firmly stepped on the pedals.

The gears moved, meshed, made fine grating sounds, and when they had focused into what felt like a wind instrument melody, the human powered helicopter left the ground despite no apparent logical connection to the rest.

"Oooh!"

Grandfather's surprised voice clipped on the speakers.

"I don't know what you're doing, but if you're gonna go, then go!"

"Understood."

Easily passing the initially hypothesized height of five meters above ground, the aircraft soared to dizzying and probably fatal heights.

"Please hang on tightly, all right!"

Controls were actually quite simple.

Firmly pushing on the pedals meant ascending. Relenting meant descending.

The steer rotated the vehicle left and right.

A human powered helicopter in every home!

In the blink of an eye we had ascended to nearly the same height as the Van der Graaf Zeppelin.

"N-, no looking down now..."

In the stead of answering, Assistant-san's fingers dug hard into my shoulders.

"Only look upwards."

And in the end, there went the sun, several dozen meters closer than usual.

And the clouds. And the air currents.

But no matter how close we got, we could not touch them.

I see. I understood.

There was nothing there. Despite that, inexplicably, there was romance enough to sell.

The sky was a fine thing to go to on the occasion.

"Come now, we go!"

I tilted the frame forwards, which made the lifting power that the propeller generated flow forwards and we advanced at speed.

The Van der Graaf Zeppelin was a human powered aircraft. The tenfold leg power covered the disadvantage in speed.

And still, this helicopter was sturdier than it looked.

It had far more burden put on it than what ordinary people could output, but I could still see it had no problems.

I did not believe that this human powered helicopter was using fairy technology.

It was pure human artisanry.

I was cheating a little bit at present, but I could still praise it highly.

"Humanity still does things quite well, indeed."

The human powered helicopter was pressing in on the tail of the Van der Graaf Zeppelin.

With nothing to compare with, my eyes lost their sense of distance and it felt like we were close enough that I could reach them with my hand.

"Now then, what shall we do. This aircraft of course does not have a wooden crane."

"..."

"What? You want to jump over, Assistant-san? You will take the flowers off?"

I vetoed that.

Given its shape, I could glimpse the rationale of the design of the other aircraft.

What I understood was that the wings had to be hollow, meaning they should have been like paper-mache. They could not be used as foothold.

"It would be good if we had any seeds left!"

"..."

"So, what do we do, you ask? That is obvious! Now that we are here and no one is looking..."

Assistant-san suddenly gasped.

"There is a ball holder around the waist belt!"

The boy's hand fidget around my waist and took it off from the snap ring.

"Make absolutely double-triple sure you do not drop it, all right?"

With a firm nod, Assistant-san took one of the balls out of the holder, then squeezed it tight.

He opened his fist. And there, on top of his palm,

"Tah-dah?"

That question mark was wrong.

"Mister fairy, this is an emergency!"

"Yes?" "Let's ask?"

He had suddenly increased to two.

"We want to help the people on that aircraft using this human powered helicopter. There are no restrictions, please remake it right awaaay!"

"Wah!" "Really?" "You're kidding!" "We'll do it, we'll do it!" "Let's go!"

The fairies suddenly scattered in all directions.

And then, just like they did with the rotten boat, they performed super refactoring of the human powered helicopter while it was in flight.

Countless rotors big and small jutted out,

their arms extended in every direction,

gears meshed freely in every geometric direction,

the steering wheel became a helicopter's bar,

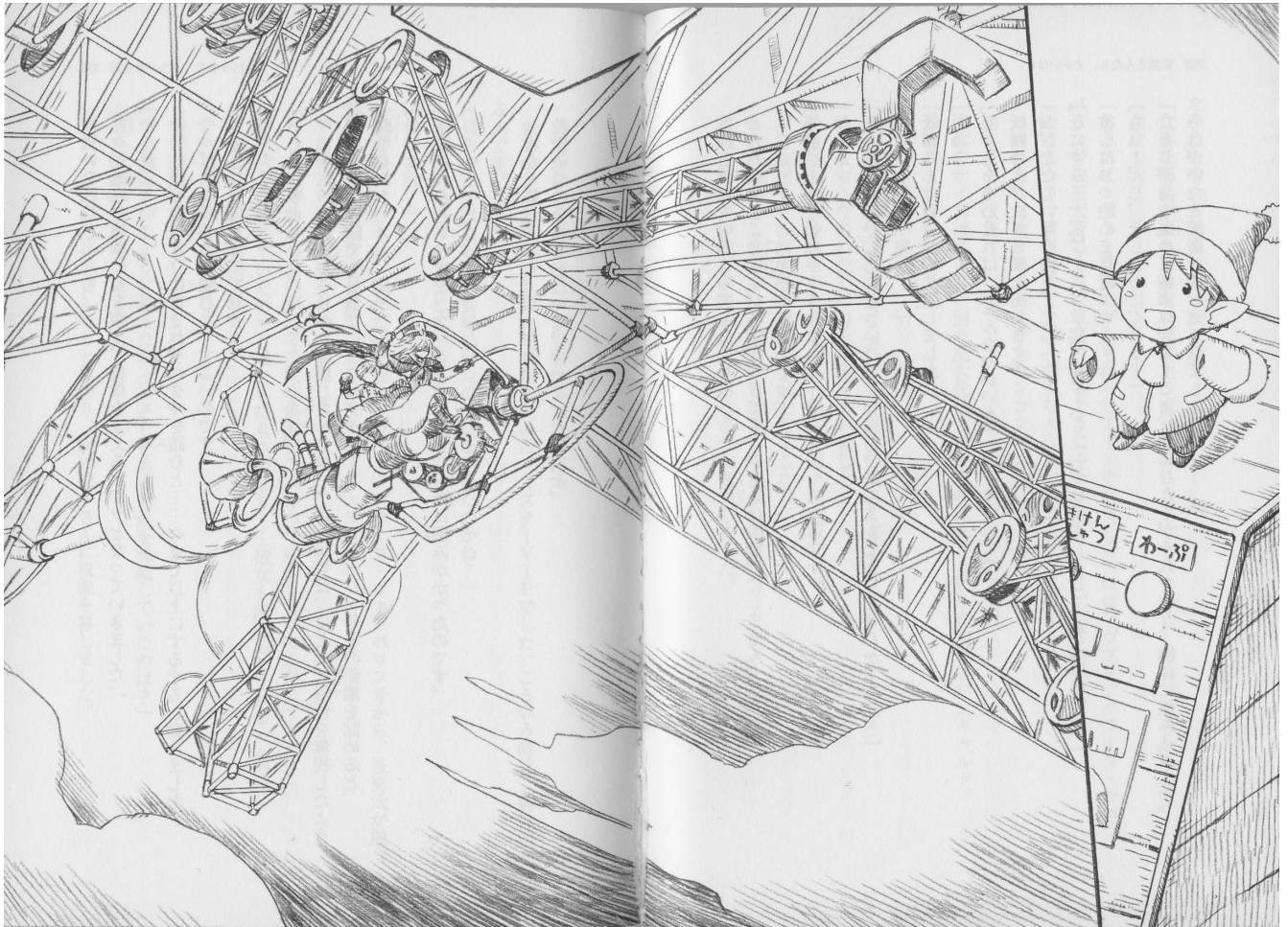
for some reason an unnecessary exhaust muffler was added,

a trumpet, the sole and only metal part, emitted for some reason a relaxing sound, and on both sides there were three-fingered manipulators.

"T-, this can be no longer called a helicopter... this is a monster... a monster of the skies..."

I shivered all over as I christened it.

"This is AA, the Aero Animal!"



The panel had also been refactored.

There were terms that bothered me, such as 'afterburner!' and 'escape from the atmosphere' and 'warp', but I ignored them all and searched for the switch to control the manipulators.

It appeared that the gloves that hung below the panel were it.

But using them while piloting...

Assistant-san quickly extended his hand and grabbed the gloves.

"I leave them to you!"

"..."

He nodded vigorously and sat deep in the rear seat that had been just added.

He wore the gloves, moved his hands, and the manipulators opened and closed matching him.

"It looks like the other aircraft is gradually increasing in speed. First of all, pluck those flowers, if you please!"

The manipulators extended forwards.

A gust of wind blasted them from the sides.

The aircraft swung visibly and the manipulators grazed the Van der Graaf Zeppelin's wings.

"Try not to break their wings..."

Although at present, my piloting would also be responsible were that to happen.

I became scrupulously careful as I piloted the helicopter.

The manipulators skillfully picked off one bunch of Flowercopters.

"Keep it up!"

But because of that the Van der Graaf Zeppelin lost its balance, and off it went to the side.

"Pick a flower on the opposite side!"

However, the Van der Graaf Zeppelin started rotating, and the manipulators grasped air.

I hurried and tried following, but the aircraft was sluggish and slow to respond, so the AA went and drew a lenient curve.

Distance opened up in an instant.

"Grrrr!"

I pedaled so furiously I was trampling the sky, I heard a dry cracking sound, and the resistance from the pedal vanished at once.

Feeling my foot twank and fall downwards I reflexively froze.

"What? What?!"

There was a rattling sound which passed through the craft's interior and went out from the forwards part... had something broken?

As proof of my bad presentiment, the propellers that covered the heavens stopped one after another.

"What the, fairies!"

The soles of the fairies' shoes were sticking to the wooden frame that had been laid down, walking down in a pitter-patter with quite the stability.

"It appears something important has broken! Could you repair it?"

"OK!"

"Also, more speed! Reduce the shaking of the frame! And just in case, make it so that we seat the trio from the Van der Graaf Zeppelin!"

"We go!" "It's simple!" "We do it?" "We so do it, we so do it!"

Thunk-thunk-thunk-thunk rumble-rumble-rumble-rumble creak-creak-creak bonk-bonk-bonk-bonk!

Super speed achieved.

The aircraft got bigger by one further size. At this point it was a giant of the sky. Or rather, it was some avant-garde piece in the sky.

"It's done!"

"Ngh, the pedals feel heavy..."

"Functionality's UP!" "Please output 3.5 HP."

That was beyond my strength at present.

It was perhaps Assistant-san riding with me that made the load reach the limit line all at once.

And regardless, I still just barely managed to pedal.

But as it happened, bad things always came one after the other around me.

Suddenly, the weight of the pedals became abnormally high.

It was like I was trying to row on the ground.

No matter how much force I used, even putting my weight on it, the pedals did not shift in the slightest.

...the effect of the drink had ended.

"Fairieees, FAIRIEEEEEES!"

"Yes!"

"Sorry to keep bothering you. Could you make it so that the thing can fly with 0.3 HP, please?"

"..."

The fairies sunk into silence for a short while.

"You cannot?"

"If we join our strengths!" "No matter the wish!" "It's all easy?"

The fairies showed up one after another.

They were countless in number.

"What will we do?" "We use ourselves as parts?" "That would be goody-good." "Let's get started?"

They got started.

"Transform! Structural gears!"

One rounded up and turned into a gear, another picked that up and installed him in the machine.

And that was repeated in many locations.

The fairies were a crowd.

One after another they turned into machine gears, becoming parts and supporting the aircraft.

"How is it?"

Encouraged by the last remaining one, I stepped on the pedals and... I was able to operate them even more smoothly than before.

When fairies meshed together the results were of course amazing.

I stuck out my thumb.

"Perfect!"

Next I only needed to carry out my job.

The Aero Animal had now turned into a flawless and perfect human powered helicopter, and ignoring most inertia it lurched forwards haphazardly, closing the distance with the Van der Graaf Zeppelin, and then,

"Assistant-san!"

"...!"

The newly added eight-fingered manipulators grabbed on all at once.

We landed at a location several dozen kilometers away from the venue.

We fired a rescue smoke signal and waited for over six hours.

Eventually people from the venue came to pick us up.

The very first person that showed up from the trailer was Mister VIP. He'd be the first to come out at times like this.

"Why if it isn't miss granddaughter. You weren't at the venue?"

"Well, I had things I needed to do."

"Where are the people who need rescuing?"

Looking embarrassed, the eldest brother showed up from the Van der Graaf Zeppelin, now only a fuselage with its wings ripped off.

"Ah, sorry for causing you trouble."

"Now how did you get rescued? What happened to the Cannon Club's human powered helicopter?"

"Who knows... we passed out, we have no idea... and she won't tell us."

Swish, and I went forwards.

"The helicopter crashed on the way here."

"It looked like it was flying right, but... who exactly was piloting that thing?"

"A mysterious and wonderful Resolver."

The Mister stared fixed at me, then shifted his gaze to Assistant-san.

"Is it true what she's saying?"

"..."

"What? It is? Hum..."

"So, what happened to the helicopter? Did it crash?"

Grandfather was stifling a yawn as he showed up from the truck.

"The Kusunoki Cannon Club helicopter was flown away by the mysterious and wonderful Resolver off towards the eastern sky."

Grandfather stared at me with dubious eyes, but eventually he lifted his lips in a tough smile and,

"That Resolver is really good at running, looks like."

"Hoh hoh hoh..."

"So, professor, I believe the victory goes to the Light Blazers."

"We've!" "Won?"

Hearing the voices of the adults the twins woke up, sluggishly took off their blankets and came outside.

"But it was an accident..."

"Well, even deducting that, you people go the furthest distance from land, you did."

"I just cannot accept that."

"Now what's the problem? We got a trophy here, not having anyone win it would be damn sad," went Grandfather.

"The contest is scheduled for next year too. How about you people keep it until then?"

"..."

Well, if that was how things were, went what was written on his face.

"Come now, let's get back to the venue. Everyone's still waiting for you. Gotta have us a good closing ceremony too!"

We walked forwards, headed for the truck.

I was bringing up the rear, and the only person I saw was Assistant-san.

"Whopsie..."

A cube fell down at my feet.

It did not have a smooth surface, it had mysterious patterns like geometrical components assembled together.

And suddenly, bwahm, it opened up.

Ah, this is bad, but by the time I thought that I was too late, and the cube emitted wooden sounds as it expanded explosively. It ignored all sorts of physical laws as it did so.

What assembled after its expansion was, without doubt, the Aero Animal.

"Go back, go back!"

I mashed the 'carriable toy' button on the panel and once again the craft's individual components folded by the joints and returned back to a compact form.

"...mh?"

Oh no, the twins suspected something.

By a hair's breadth, the Aero Animal had returned to a four cubic centimeter size before the boy turned around.

But it seemingly happened too fast, as one colorful gear tumbled out and disappeared.

Well, this was a once-in-a-lifetime encounter, so I was sure that I would meet him again some other time.

And with this, the flying ace contest came to an end without anyone hurt.

However, as far as the work I carried out was concerned, after returning to the Village I was somehow saddled with the paperwork. Dealing with the aftermath, to call it.

The contest had been carried out by what could be called proper procedures, but partway through they came to ignore necessary processes and so it was necessary to formally assemble all the documents, and that job was handed down to the last in the chain, which was I.

Acting on his own initiative without considering the problems in the field was why Mister VIP was a VIP.

The documents I had to produce had increased massively.

I worked day after day dawn and then dusk.

Mornings and noons and nights I stared at pieces of paper.

I thought this was going to end with me falling ill.

I occasionally went somewhere else to work so I could release the stress, filling out forms that required the malicious types of description typical of the bureaucracy.

As I sat down on the edge of the fountain in the square of the Village and finally finished writing the final documents, deep emotion and an odd compulsion overwhelmed me.

"Re☆Solved! (sideways peace sign)"

That was what I shouted.

Fairy Memo - Foldable Human Powered Helicopter

The nearly fully wooden human powered helicopter had been recreated by the hand of the fairies and became foldable.

Ignoring a variety of things (such as the laws of physics), this helicopter makes it possible to fly free in the sky using only the strength of one's legs.

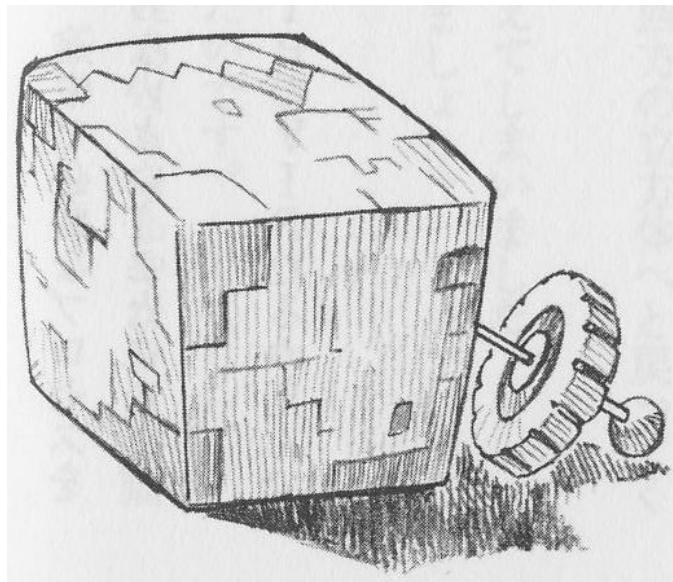
It also comes equipped with a very convenient foldable feature, which turns it into a tiny cube that can be carried around in a pocket.

The components use fairies themselves as screws and gears.

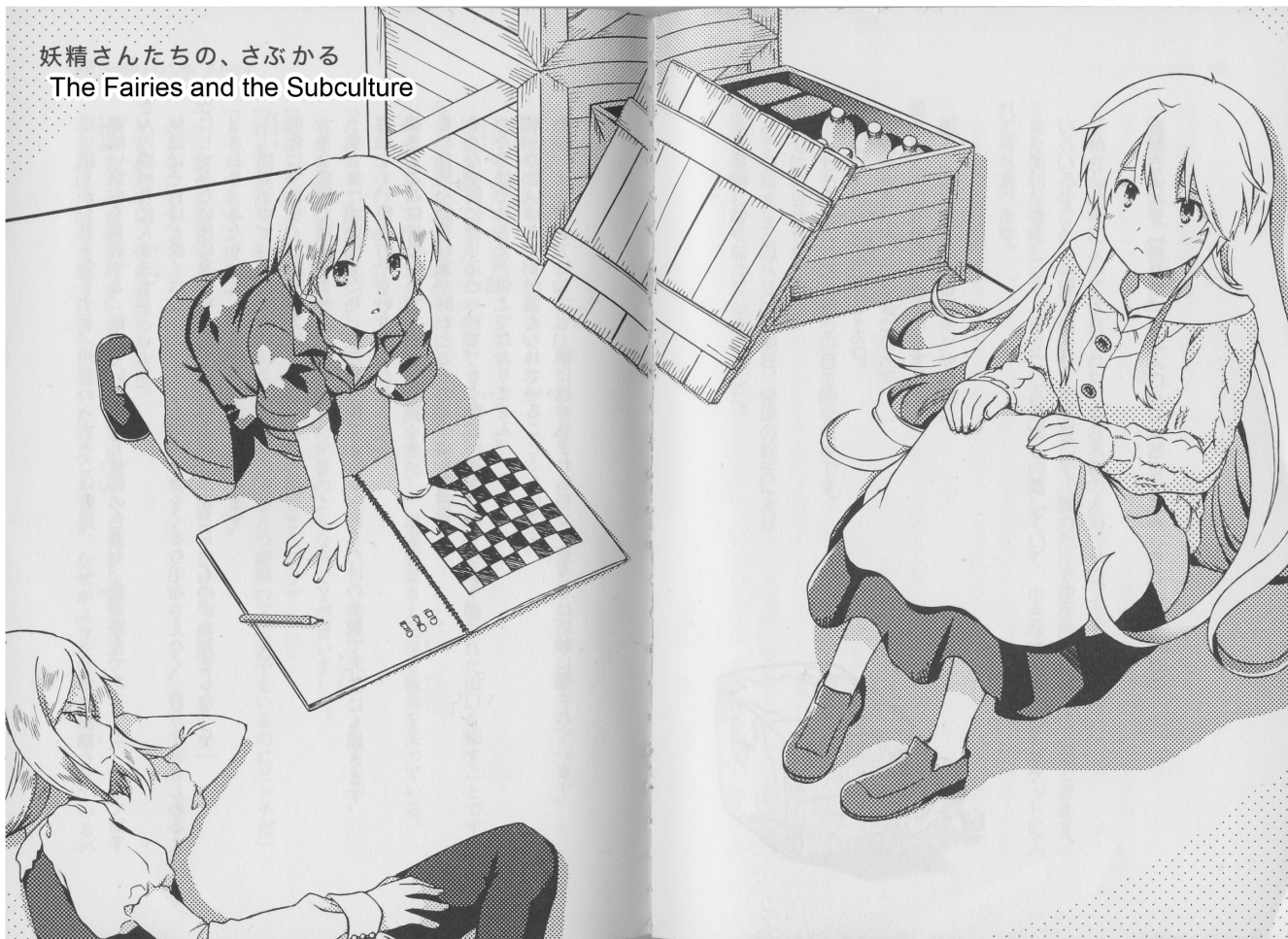
Using living humans as screws, truly, normally it would be a matter for a lawsuit.

But that was of course their voluntary sacrifice, they were not forced.

This incredibly massive helicopter has at present gears missing, meaning it will never again unfold to its full size.



妖精さんたちの、さぶかる
The Fairies and the Subculture



I woke up from a light sleep and found myself in the exact same locked room.
I looked around the dimly lit room and my eyes hit upon my worst friend Y, who looked tired even as she was sleeping, as well as Assistant-san.
Although the temperature did not seem to be that low, laying on the floor without being covered by a blanket, hugging themselves, appeared quite chilly.
At times, the two let out moans of pain.
...they had reached their limit.
Not the physical one, the mental one.
This was not a big room.
Walking ten paces meant hitting the wall, and if one could ignore gravity, it would take the same amount of steps to reach the ceiling.
There were no windows and I saw nothing that could be called furniture.
There was no door here, either.
It was a completely sealed room, the kind that a mystery novel enthusiast would love.
Several days had passed since we had been shoved into this space.
We did not even have any memories of that.
The sole and only relief was how there was a toilet installed, that was about it.
Even that toilet door was set deep into the wall, and its edges were skillfully hidden.
There was of course no window inside the toilet.
There was therefore no exit.
It was natural to think that.
The only constructive act that could be taken inside this space that appeared to be surrounded by the void was to search for an exit, but we could not exactly keep doing that.
Endlessly unproductive days made our mental states grow worse, and even our senses of reality were utterly losing their contours.
And that was how we were at the moment.
"Mwaaah, did you find the exit?"
Having woken up wrong, Y said that with the voice of a dead woman as she lifted her upper body.
"I have also just woken up. Come now, we should search for the exit."
"I just want to have a bath. I'm gonna stink soon. Having a boy under the same roof's a problem."
"As long as you use the toilet's water, then go ahead."
"...could you not provoke me right from the morning, we're friends, aren't we? We're the same age, aren't we."
Y and I were the last graduates of The School.
We were true worst friends, we could not yet tell whether we got along or not.
After graduation we had worked in different lands, but for some reason we now came to be sealed inside this room. I should probably start speaking about that.

One cold, cold Winter morning, a classic car parked with a drift before my house, making me shudder quite a bit as I was innocently shoveling snow.
"Yah, 'morning, pal."
A slender girl with silver hair descended from the driver seat. That was Y.
"Ugh..."
"What's that for!"
"I thought I would not be seeing you for a while."

"I just went to pick this thing up."

"A car, huh. What happened with it? Do not tell me it came from rationing?"

"Yup. I invested enough for three years. Took a loan, girl, a loan, heh heh."

"You moron, we got a moron here!"

"That's a steam car, right?"

Grandfather promptly exhaled a sigh.

"Yes, it's a reproduction model that's hybrid with solar energy... well, the restoration of one."

"That's still impressive. A Stanley steam generator, right. In really good shape."

"Right, you made a really good purchase. You can stay the night."

"Thank you very much, professor."

Y made a personable if artificial smile, something unlike her, but also something that at this point I was accustomed to.

"So, you did not come here just to boast, I hope?"

"I don't know. I'm actually involved in a job and..."

The fire in the stove was quietly crackling and the wet towel hung over it began releasing humidity.

"I guess I'll take some tea. It's cold today!"

"How brazen of you..."

I made strong tea for two.

As she stuck her lips to it and drank, her pale cheeks regained their color.

"Got no sweets today?"

"We got some ice cream. It is inside the snow outside."

"...let's not."

"Have this."

I pushed a nutcracker and a bag of nuts towards Y.

"So there was something."

She accepted them happily and began cracking the nuts, looking like she was having fun. Crick and crack.

"So what is the job?"

"The People Monument."

"...are they still working on that?"

"They've been working on it for a long time. They just said that the work on the lands was slow."

"I believed it had been finished already."

"It's not finished. It's always been a project that was going to progress little by little across the years. Excavation, interpretation, compilation. At present they can have as many people they want and it still won't be enough, and it seems like the structural construction of the monument isn't going well, technologically speaking."

The People Monument Project...

The final stone monument left behind by a humanity presently in their very lauded decline. Being also a high capacity storage device, it would encompass the whole of us, our history, our technology, and our culture... or so it should have been.

"I also heard they were going to build it around here."

"At present there is a historically large amount of data in Kusunoki, I suppose. Whatever else, at present, there are few lands that can be unarguably said to have a proper sense of history." For example soil strata, at times higher and lower strata can be turned upside down, so it was

not necessarily so that lower strata would be older. The same thing happened with human history, even if we understood steam powered machines, we could not, concretely speaking, determine which era of history they belonged to, and that was just one of many examples. Therefore, among the uncertain sources there were some that said we stepped on the moon several hundred years after the first successful commercial space shuttle flight, incoherent descriptions that appeared casually here and there.

And to that extent, well, I suppose it is easy to understand if categorized under basic mistakes.

The tricky ones were the ones difficult to verify, such as chronological and technological history.

History was a jumbled mess.

As the generations went along, the amount of information required to represent a culture exploded in volume.

The progress of technology, the increase in population, the documentation of history...

As population approached the ten billion, it turned into something like a Cambrian explosion. Particularly when it came to the last few hundred years of prosperity, where science was said to be at its peak, whatever document I skimmed felt like I was reading a fairy tale. Unable to tell whether it was true or false, putting back together the scattered fragments was impossible. The setbacks (to put it bluntly) that the People Monument Project had encountered should have things of that sort behind them.

"...besides, they started building that People Monument before they decided the structure of the storage device."

To compare this to a car, they were building the frame before developing the engine... something like that.

"Right. I guess they had to act like they were doing something. Posturing, it's all posturing."

"Depending on how the monument is structured, they might have to rebuild it."

"No, they won't rebuild it, won't they. The very first commemorative plaque was said to have been thrown away with still nothing inside."

"...sigh, what a waste."

"It's all a waste of money."

I did not know what intentions there were behind that project.

It was just lacking in planning, it was unmistakably something that advanced through mere inertia, and as a result, it has become a shining example of neglect even among the UN offices in the various countries.

"They only work on that when they don't have anything else to work on, I guess? ...that's sort of how they're treating it."

"As a red tape job."

"That was accepted as adequate back in the field, I guess. But there're people who don't like it."

I did not speak and made a gesture to point at the ceiling.

Y gave me a deep nod.

"They could just do it leisurely, instead they worry me. That kind of people, I mean."

"It cannot be that those people acted all gentlemanly and had surly faces?"

"They did. To give it a Shakespearean title, they felt like a *Midsummer Night's Dream*."

Awww, I hoped the Mister VIP was in good health, wherever he was...

"And so the buck got handed down to me. I gotta gather data all by myself."

"Despite the storage device being incomplete..."

"Worst case scenario, they're talking about preserving the actual data."

"You must be joking!"

Jamming papers and books and photographs inside the Monument then sealing them in?
If they opened it ten thousand years later, everything inside would be dust.

"They should just use digital media."

"Like electromagnetic tapes or electromagnetic disks. But I have it that neither will keep that long. A few dozen years at best, ideally several hundred years. There's instances where people have been able to read paper and brush records a thousand years later."

"There is a limit on the volume of data that can be preserved via paper alone."

"And that, well," Y went on as she tossed a nut in her mouth. "There's other things that are definitely lacking."

"For example?"

"My knowledge and passion for human history."

"..."

This woman just wanted to have fun.

That was what the instinct developed over many long years of being together told me.

She wanted to have all the fun she wanted, then pick some random excuse and give up.

And that despite being the newest employee.

But I too had had my fair share of trouble ever since getting a job back in my hometown.

I had the right to get angry at her, I believed.

"Why you..."

"Well, in the beginning I did things seriously. The professor was there, and if I found some history book or historical data in good condition, we could have just submitted it as it was. There's no real need to research or compile stuff."

"But before you do, let me have a look, please."

"If I find anything."

And then she leaned into the chair, making the sort of tipsy spaced out face someone who was about to go on a long vacation would make.

In the present, where the number of humans had rapidly decreased, currency had been abandoned.

In a village community it was common to see commodity exchange and self-sufficiency, and our living like this was only made possible by the support of the UN.

Us Mediators were diplomats working for the UN.

The pay came in physical goods (or physical good rationing tickets).

The job specifically entailed resolving the various problems that could arise between the fairies, which were considered the new humanity, and us, the past humanity.

Although there was no executive director, there were jobs that required supporting the development programs of the UN.

If Y was in charge of the People Monument Project, then supporting her was my role.

But I would simply never have thought I would have to go along with her on that.

"I have it that the master of that house died not long ago. And when they sorted through his belongings, they found a massive number of these things underground."

Y tapped the copy machine with a full face smile.

"It was preserved with its manual. Wanna have a look?"

I gave it a quick skim.

"So this is a machine that makes copies of documents. I wonder when this was built..."

The manual was not complete.

The outside parts, the front and back covers, had been completely lost.

Consequently, we could not find data on the year of creation or the like.

"Whatever its age, they made sure to preserve it properly, so it's still working. Got electricity?"

The late owner of the house was comparatively famous around these parts.

For one, he had been an aristocrat in times past.

Being that he disliked associating with people he did not go around the village much, so I had never spoken to him.

As I had it, this large mansion in the Romanesque style stood on its own in the outskirts of town, reminding of an ancient monastery, and two servants had lived in it ever since olden times.

It often happened that houses like those held precious documents and machines.

The pattern held this time as well.

"It's not just this. We even found a rotary press and paper production equipment. There was some facility underground."

"I see..."

As the pattern went, their ancestors worked in that sector.

It did depend on when the machinery was made, regardless, even in this age of sunset of humanity the technology to prevent mechanical degradation was quite accomplished, which was thought as something comparatively miraculous for these days.

I did go inspect a factory in the past, and this might be from the same era as that.

"You found quite the fine thing, have you."

"It's not just that. What I really wanted is elsewhere."

"What you really want?"

"...data."

"Data, which do you mean?"

"I suppose these've been printed with those machines back in the day. They're printed goods."

"So that was what he was hiding in that mansion..."

"The data format's fairly specific, so it looks like it needs a specialized device to read it. With the analyzing devices I had in hand I couldn't do anything about it. You got electricity here, right?"

"Yes, this area does have electricity."

"The data is for this device, so if we print it we should be able to see what's in it."

"Uh-huh."

The face Y had at the time was one of pure curiosity.

She had nothing else about her.

Even now I believe I should have stopped her back then.

One week later, Y broke.

Strange things began circulating in Kusunoki Village, the Village of the Camphor Tree.

It had a little bit of a boom, but only among young girls.

It was a tiny booklet, bound simply by just folding printed paper.

Inside there was a manga.

Right, a manga.

Comic, cartoon, bande dessinée, caricature, 漫画... in short, the pages were split into frames, with a story carried out by drawn pictures and word balloons, a wonderful medium.

In the distant past, there were specialist mangakas who earned their daily bread just by drawing mangas.

And it is said that people formed lines outside bookstores looking to buy those manga books, utterly absorbed in reading them.

In the present generation, our perception of that was different.

There were no specialized mangakas.

It was mainly a past-time for younger girls.

This may be obvious, but being it was a hobby, while there were on the occasion skilled girls, generally the contents were all crude.

Even I could manage illustrations.

And any girl would be interested in that at least at one time.

There were even some that wanted to be mangakas as a job.

A sensible touch and a superb ability to depict things, drawings of people with intricately detailed expressions, and backgrounds so detailed it was impossible to imagine how they were drawn: that was the difference in dimensions.

I even heard that mangas used to be a proper part of civilization.

I had no intention of objecting to those who believed that.

But even among those precious mangas there were few that managed to assemble a complete story from top to bottom.

What I had seen so far were only parts of the stories, only parts of the pages.

However, what was now before my eyes...

Walking around the Village, glancing around the general stores and open air stalls with their young managers, I saw it distributed for free.

Although it was a mere twelve pages, it was in fact a complete and full-fledged manga.

"A Pleasant Love"

Jackie, the protagonist, was a normal adult you could find anywhere who was worried about his freckles!

One day, Jackie bumped into a brash young fellow and it turned into a serious fight.

But as it happened, the next day he learned that the guy was a transfer student at his school—

The conclusion was that boys liked other boys, and Jackie had only dressed up like a girl.

"B-, b-, but this is...!"

Perfect backgrounds that felt like they were drawn by a machine, flawless, but still individualized drawings.

And a distinctive panel layout that was very effective in making them stand out.

Humanity at present could never draw this, it was a lost art.

A Lost Technology... or rather, a Lost Technique!

"Excuse me, is this...?"

I asked about it at the girl on duty.

"It's amazing, isn't it? It's really popular right now. If you want to distribute them yourself, you know you can get as many as you like at the Manga Mansion?"

The Manga Mansion was the estate of that former aristocrat that Y was combing through.

"What is the meaning of this!"

"I told you, it's the data."

She seemingly predicted I would attack, as Y answered very calmly.

"There was one full manga volume there, complete and full. I printed it and did some photocopies. Whatever else, I have it that these photocopies were how, in the past manga culture, the most basic way of making announcements."

Y had remained sequestered in the Manga Mansion for one week.

Her hair was frayed, her eyes were bloodshot, but she remained very energetic despite that...

This is what came from all-nighters and lack of sleep for days on end.

"I just thought this was something you could submit to the People Monument Project."

"I will submit it. I just need to research it a little bit more."

"And what else is there to research about this."

"I still got lots of data to go. It's in light disks. Sadly they were really degraded, and the majority of the data is just fragmentary. I'm data salvaging 24 hours a day. There's intact data disks, so if things go well, I might be able to dig up complete works like A Pleasant Love."

"...I did read it, you know, this A Pleasant Love thing."

"How was it?"

"It is the sort of thingy about fellow men that you would love."

"Don't call it thingy. It's healthy, I'm telling ya. And strictly speaking, PL (abbreviation) is sort of different from the lines I like... still, well. Besides, that manga just happened to be about that stuff, so I won't deny it."

"Huh?"

"There's still so many things that will blossom. Right, I'm rotten to the core..."

"What? Blossom... are young leaves in blossom? Are the roots rotten?"

"Heh heh, you don't get it, do you. You don't get it at all."

Y followed rules only she could understand and smiled at me.

I got really angry.

"What the... that attitude of yours... why are you smiling at me like that?"

"Your inability to understand culture is so evident that I just happened to give you my wry smile. Right, at present, I am a cultural being extremely near the divine. And I don't mean some high-brow culture impressed with itself," and she licked her lips. "I mean a dodgy and indecent subculture."

...it looked like she had merely gotten weird in the head to me.

"I just do not understand."

"Well, just wait and see. This movement's gonna spread far and wide. I can feel it in my hands."

"I do not really mind if it spreads, but what about your job?"

"Putting culture together's my job right now, so there's no problem, I'm telling ya."

"...is that so?"

I felt that she was deviating from it.

Well, still, I was going to go past Y and into the Mansion to have a look, I will postpone thinking for after that.

There were girls busily going back and forth in the mansion's lobby, but since the trouble-loving fairies did not seem to be involved, this was outside my jurisdiction, of course.

There was nothing I could speak up about this.

"Them girl's are helping me. Since this is getting on a scale that I can't handle alone. Besides, come on, we gotta practice portraiture."

"Portraiture?"

"You didn't do that when you were little? Drawing your friends and showing it to each other."

"I am still drawing even now."

"Ahhh, then you should participate to the study group. This way."

"What is this study group about?"

"Oh, come on," Y said that reproachfully. "It's a manga skill study group."

"..."

I at long last found the one word I could use to describe this event.

In short, she had been caught.

By what, you ask?

By a media that could allow free and unrestrained expression of imagination... by manga.

Three more days passed.

The topic of manga made the rounds among the younger girls.

That was because Copy Magazines issues two and three, taken from newly excavated data, were being distributed.

I also read them, and what was in them was certainly laudable.

The drawing skills were overwhelming, and there were many fresh ideas.

However, as the subject matters dealt only with love between men, they were only popular among younger girls.

If they had were more popular genres I expected they would be welcomed by the general population, too...

From the fourth issue on, the manga stopped being a photocopy.

They had managed to start up the printing press.

The first printing of that fourth issue was brought to my by a Y who at that moment had an air to her that felt like she was the very embodiment of a hermit.

"Have a read of it, o friend of mine. And then give us a hearty congratulation for this cultural revival."

"Kusunoki New Publishing, first issue...?"

"It's actually the fourth issue, but we decided to restart the numbering. I got the name of the magazine from the village here. First, have a look at how amazingly we've done it. This is the might of a professional printing press! It's at a level that even the creator of the movable type printing press, Gutenberg, would piss himself while clutching his beard."

"That guy would be a hundred million times more impressive than you, however..."

"B5 offset for 36 pages! A beautiful poly-propylene treated front page that spreads an intense presence wherever it's put! It's the most perfect publishing of the excavated manga, *I'll Never Let a Woman Have You!*"

"Well done thinking up an awful title like that..."

"I didn't think it up at all, get me. It's what the mangaka decided a long time ago."

"This is a New Publishing, so are you going to continue printing these?"

"Of course. We're going for a weekly printing."

"Despite it not being your actual job."

"We still haven't dug up every complete work yet, so it might be difficult at the moment. But in the near future we will definitely make this weekly magazine. We stake our soul on it."

I believed the lady ought to be staking her soul on the People Monument Project.

"And we got this amazing project going on, too. If you're interested, come to the study group. We'll be waiting."

"...someday, maybe."

It could be said that I still did not like Y's passion.

Several further days later, Y brought me... a *Kusunoki* several times thicker than the previous one.

How much effort did they put in making this book?

Let us call it unorthodox enthusiasm.

"Well done putting together all these source materials."

"We decided to publish even incomplete ones as long as what remained makes sense.

Besides, if we search the data carefully, we usually find the rest. We're serializing them.

Starting with this, the *Kusunoki* is gonna have three volumes of serialized stories and one of full story, then we're printing two volumes of short-page gag mangas. We're also publishing advertising from the Village. Like the flea market notices."

I was stunned.

Thinking about the mess that this woman made back in school, however, it was not that unexpectable.

The problem was how she was involving people around her and how it spread to them.

"This gag manga is sort of poorly drawn."

"No need for drawing skills there. What a gag manga needs is edge. That's why one of the two volumes of gag mangas we're printing here was drawn by our staff."

"By those girls?"

"Yeah, they're all in the study group. There's a mountain of teaching tools there. There's nothing we can't accomplish with some learning."

If she only put that passion in her real job she would have all the fame she could want.

"The girls are all putting their backs into this. And we're leaving those we discovered having superior skills in charge of the serialization, just to see how they do. This way we don't have to split up and dig up the conclusion. And on the way we might manage to shoulder the burden of serialization... or that's what I'm thinking. That's what we're doing, trying to breathe life back into manga."

What fever.

Inside my head, a fairy went 'excuse me!' and crossed past.

If they discovered this... they would go along with it.

They liked fun things.

They liked it when humans crowded and made lots of noise.

They also really loved imitating us.

"Could you keep this on the down low for a little bit longer? If you hurry you will draw the eyes of the headquarters and you will be in trouble, you know?"

"I didn't think of that..." Y lowered her gaze, a gesture that said she was deep in thought. "But it's too late now."

"Did you just say it is too late?"

"The caravan came the other day, right?"

"Come it did."

Commodities tend to be fewer in Winter, so there were queues. It was a typical scene of these seasons.

"I happened to hand off copies of the second issue of *Kusunoki* and told them to circulate them through the country."

"..."

That was fast. That was way too fast.
It was going to circulate all through the country.
There was a sound of collapse somewhere in my consciousness.
It was the sound of my peaceful days collapsing.
A premonition that I will be involved in something problematic once more and have my fill of annoyances.
"Well, that's how it's gonna be, I guess."
I did not feel anything that said Y realized how serious this was from how she spoke.
Rather, it felt like she was saying that everything was about short-term pleasure.
"It's said that the manga magazines of times past published a variety of works to satisfy a variety of demands. But our *Kusunoki* is different. We pursue content devoted to one single taste. I'm making it a publication targeting same-sex... I call it, same-sex magazine."
It was the birth of the same-sex magazine.

With our Village at the center, *Kusunoki*, the magazine specialized in depicting romance between beautiful men and beautiful boys, became extremely popular.
Carried by the caravan and distributed in various lands, even there the same-sex magazine came to have an impressive effect, and it only took a scant few days for letters from fans to come in in massive number.
"First time in my life I've had to carry letters in a box."
Even the caravan leader's eyes were wide open.
The sheer magnitude of this was difficult to convey without visuals.
Worse, that being said, each individual letter was not exactly indifferent.

"I have read your *Kusunoki* magazine. And I believed I needed to tell you this, so I picked up the pen. Because of you, I haven't been able to sleep these last few days. I was drawn in by Matthew's romance. It was like I couldn't get to sleep. Why did you do this to me!"
(19 - F)

"Ever since I was born, I never believed that a love this complicated could happen between men. But that was a serious mistake, and worse, I now know that it was a big loss for me. And that happened the instant I read the first three pages of this magazine! Thank you for teaching me how much I've been missing out! But how am I ever going to regain what I've been missing? I sincerely hope you continue to publish these magazines!"
(16 - F)

"The tall and masculine Matthew and the short and cute Eric. This perfect pairing to win over my heart! Right now, every time I see a short-and-tall couple, my chest aches at thinking that they're not real human beings."
(17 - F)

"Poor Eric! I wanted him to marry Freddy! Actually I want him not to get married at all. After all, I kind of fell in love with Freddy..."
(13 - F)

"I have a complaint! Are you listening? Ever since reading *Kusunoki*, I haven't been able to work at all. Eric and Matthew and Freddy and Walter ganged up on me and seduced me.

They're showing me how sexy things can get between men! Now that I've become addicted, you have a duty to continue delivering me this exciting story, don't you think so?"
(21 - F)

"I never liked love stories. Trite characters, stereotyped lines, developments with no surprises. I thought them really boring. But on the other hand, I did want to read something that really made me passionate. The answer that *Kusunoki* gave me was truly innovative. I never believed that simply casting men in that boring love drama would make my chest so warm!"
(24 - F)

"I know there's no need to say this at this point. But let me say it anyway. This magazine is fantastic! I've reread it 30 times already. If you keep publishing this magazine any further, my life will be seriously hurt. But that's what I really want, too."
(28 - F)

...I did not want to read any more. I was fed up.

"That's how badly the readers want this."

All the commentary letters were swirling with intense passion, they were a crucible of lust. Y fervently read them, separated them by opinion, and hung them on the wall.

"What is that?"

"What we're using in the place of a questionnaire. With this, we can tell what the readers want."

"You cannot really mean that?"

"We've still got lots and lots to go. We got as much data as we like. Seems this place was a really big publisher, once."

"I will give you one bit of advice."

I stepped on the carpet, cut across the parlor of the Manga Mansion, which was now a repository for old books, and headed for the exit.

"Some sort of problem may happen not long from now, so you should prepare yourself right now."

"Something like being scolded by the boss?"

"No, the UN will not be involved," I looked at my worst friend across my shoulder. "There are many people who will soon be influenced by all this."

Y looked like she knew exactly what she was doing.

She asserted this in an affected manner.

"Looking forwards to it."

"They're messing with me!"

One further week later, Y's face was angry as she rushed in the Office of Mediation.

So she came at last.

My mind had already been made up.

They would never ignore an event like this.

Y tossed several same-sex magazine volumes before me.

"Have a look at these."

"Are they the new issues?"

I looked at the covers,

Sweet & harsh Boy Meets Boy - first edition same-sex magazine - Kunugi
A new era begins for forbidden girl's anthologies - Nemunoki
Pulse-pounding Man & Man - we deliver it all to you - Willow

"New same-sex magazines? Did... you print them?"
What could possibly have been up with her, I was seriously stunned.
But Y shook her head.



"Nope, it wasn't me."
"...which means?"
"They're riding on my coattails!"
Y was really embarrassed as she smacked my desk.
"The girls who read *Kusunoki* just up and published their own same-sex magazines! They stole my idea!"
I could only laugh.
"Hell's that! Why're you laughing!"
I could not hold it back, so I held my belly as I flopped on the desk.
My shoulders could not stop shivering.
"This is truly the amusing blunder."
"I'm crying here!"
She was seriously in tears, which made me burst out in laughter once again.
"So there were also places in other lands where printing presses remained intact. And where data remained, too. Now they're publishing that stuff one after the next..."
"That is what it is, culture I mean."
"This su~cks!"
"The manga industry is being revived, is that not a good thing? That was what you wanted."
"True, but... I'm not really happy about it..."
"See, I believe the people making this are innocent. They do not believe they are doing anything wrong. When someone hits upon a new idea, people who imitate it will come forwards. It is an extremely normal thing."
"..."
"What you are going to do is not to lose against these imitators and continue publishing as the originator."
"I've no intention of losing without a fight, but... sigh, I'm tired."
Her anger and confusion having seemingly settled down a bit, Y dropped her tiny bottom on

one of the free chairs.

"This could be said to be a dispute between factions. Like cultural movements, we have a split between the *Kusunoki* faction, the *Kunugi* faction, the *Nemunoki* faction..."

"They can only try making this a war."

"Well, this is where you do your best."

Assistant-san appeared with a tray in hand, with two teacups and a small bowl with baked sweets in it.

"Thank you."

"..."

He gave Y a quick bow, I gave him a smile in return, and then he vanished in the back.

Y's neck made creaking mechanical sounds as she followed him as he left.

"...who's that?"

"I did not introduce you? He is my kouhai, he acts as my Assistant..."

"Never heard of him."

"So you did not. I thought I had introduced you."

"Huh? What... who's he to you?"

"I said he is my kouhai. He is a calm boy, but he is very talented. He rarely makes mistakes."

Y's lips remained half opened.

"Right, I promised Assistant-san that I would go on a picnic with him when Spring comes around. You could come too, if you want?"

"Ngh...?"

"Ngh?"

Y's eyes flashed and she thrust a finger at me.

"You damn traitor! Living the satisfied life... all by yourself... just you watch! While you're too busy being a damn het, I will take glory with my own hands! I will follow this road to the end!"
Y kicked off of the chair and left the Office.

"Het...?"

I looked it up in dictionaries of different ages and, with difficulties, found that word.

It was a slang word, the meaning was *girl who has boys as target of affection* and *boy who has girls as target of affection*.

In short, a heterosexual.

Y did exactly as she said she would.

She became more absorbed in making mangas than ever.

Her Same-Sex Magazine publication group now called itself a circle and planned to expand its organization.

The number of their people increased, the number of their departments increased, and they published new magazines in rapid succession.

Handing the magazines over to the Salvation Army's caravan took ten people.

However, the harder the main publisher worked, the more momentum the Same-Sex Magazines from other lands gained.

That was the delusional power that the overly bored girls had during Winter.

Same-Sex Magazine circles were founded in many lands.

In a short period of time their number reached past thirty, and scenes of young girls swarming the caravans when they came to visit, waiting for them, became common.

"Do you have the new *Nemunoki*?"

"This is from *Matatabi*!"

"Hey, don't push!"

"This time I'm gonna have that new *Acacia* issue!"

"I heard you only have the previous issue from *Guts*, is that true?"

...it was the beginning of an age of strife.

However, Y was seeing further ahead in this age.

Her study groups were held more often.

The girls there were trained in sketching and perspective drawing, introduced to manga techniques, researched story making, and more.

It was easy to imagine what sort of lusts drew in these delusional young girls.

Right.

At the end of what Y was doing laid the resurrection of manga culture... a Manga Renaissance.

I could not avoid being impressed by this pointless proactivity.

"The time has come."

Right on that day, the *Kusunoki* faction published their long awaited spin-off Same-Sex Magazine, *Cinnamon*.

With *Kusunoki* as their main strength, they tried to reel in more viewers with that.

Cinnamon was published in B5 and had 216 pages.

Considering that the average Same-Sex Magazines at present were around 20-30 pages, it was truly non-standard.

Its impact was huge.

It had no recovered mangas, everything was drawn bespoke. It was all done by current authors.

Although on the points of drawing skills and techniques they were not up to the standards of excavated ones, the passionate style that exuded fermented lusts entranced maidens who held delusions of Boy Meets Boy in their hearts, dragging them to the limits of ecstasy.

The existence of this monstrous Same-Sex Magazine became promptly known all around the country, and as a result, made the name *Kusunoki* infamous in the world of same sex.

It did not seem likely that the other circles could ignore the Cinnamon Shock, either.

Those other circles picked up excavated works that they had not printed due to pages missing, drew new pages for them, published them one after the other, and attempted to stop the one-party domination with that, but the additions were drawn with a clearly different style, which brought them criticism and only made the domination of *Kusunoki* even firmer.

Now was the time for Y to go on the offensive.

The first issue of the *Quarterly Laurel* was that.

This was a same-sex magazine that was limited to fifteen year old girls unsatisfied with their love, which was the publishing trend.

These tales of sensitive boys, weaved like glasswork between lusts and bonds, came to seize the hearts of girls that followed specific trends.

The *Kusunoki* faction won the war of attrition.

Y started wearing gaudier clothes.

She commanded a massive crowd of disciples, she was buried in the tributes that made for price for the Same-Sex Magazines, and indulged in a life of depravity and luxury.



"Depravity, what a nice word. Maidens should just rot away. By reading my Same-Sex Magazines, of course..."

Rot, rot, rot, she made the rottenmost, sorry, toughest of smiles as she tilted a glass filled with noblerot wine, licked her lips over rotten flesh, and pinched up some anchovy fillet (fermented) and blue cheese (fermented).

However, an unexpected ambush awaited her there.

"Your magazines are too heavy! And they're too many! They're too popular! We can't transport necessities anymore with all this stuff! Sorry, but next time just use your own people to distribute them!"

It visited her in the shape of the merciless declaration of a death god from the Salvation Army caravan.

Her distribution network was all too abruptly interrupted.

In this age where distributors have disappeared, the cooperation of the caravan was indispensable in the distribution of the Same-Sex Magazines.

It was the same as being shot in her Achilles' heel.

Without distribution routes, the magazine boom could not be maintained.

At the end of rigorous thinking, Y had a revelation.

It was a turnabout idea, specifically that of having the readers come to her.

...they were going to hold an open house.

Boy Meets Boy open house Davide's Rose Garden Circle participation guide

Date: XX December XXXX

Location: Kusunoki General Cultural Center, first and second floors

Applicant spaces: 60 spaces

Schedule:

6-8 circle admission

8-9 beginning of attendee admission

9-onwards open house

12-13 stage events (set up outdoors)

16 conclusion

"Huh? Right below the Office?"

They said it was going to be held on the first floor of this building.

"Yeah, I gave them permission," calmly went Grandfather.

"...do you know the exact nature of this event?"

"I don't. They're drawing pictures an'selling them, right?"

"I hope that is all this comes down to."

My unease was on the mark.

Long conference tables had been set up inside the building.

One of them was assigned to each circle and that became a sales space.

That was why there was plenty of leeway when it came to those sixty spaces.

...and despite that, they were most certainly not enough.

On morning of the event, twenty thousand girls jostled about Kusunoki Village.

"What is all thiiiiiiis!"

"This's amazing. It's a big hit."

I drew close to Y as she blurted that out all brazenly.

"Forget this building, those people cannot fit inside the Village!"

"Just have them wait. We got entry restrictions."

"That... you are doing that to customers!"

"It's fine. It's how things are. In this world, right."

"Is... that so...?"

This had gone completely beyond my understanding at this point.

Of course, this number of people jostling through the Village would cause a ruckus among the residents.

A representative of the Village visited Grandfather.

"Sensei, what the hell's this mess about?"

"An open house or something. Looks like something like a festival for younger girls."

"But in a number like this..."

"I have it that it's gonna end today, and it looks like everyone's brought their own lunches, so, well, how about just sit by and watch."

"Huh, if you say so, sensei..."

That conversation was held as he was building a model of a ship.

As for Assistant-san, he was so terrified of the terrifying lust coming from the army of girls that he was shivering in a room in the back.

...poor boy.

Y was the main sponsor of the event, but also the representative of the *Kusunoki* faction.

And so she had to confront the representatives of the various circles on that day.

"Welcome and good morning. Today we're gonna have some fun."

"Thank you." "Yes, we shall."

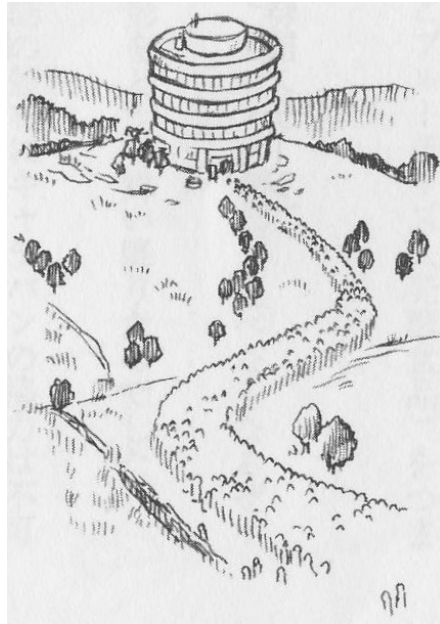
The three largest powers in the same sex world, *Kusunoki* excluded, were the *Nezunoki* and the *Kunugi*, and their representative smiled friendly smiles at her.

Of course, they were all artificial.

To Y, this event was the perfect occasion to show her arch enemies the difference in strength.

The open house began full of unease.

Due to the admission restrictions, a massively long queue had formed that reached outside the Village.



The people of the Village stared at this snaking queue of lust while unable to shake the feeling of unease from their faces.

Same-Sex Magazines were generally distributed free of charge, and it seemed a lot less confusing than I thought it would be.

The queue was smoothly sucked into the building in less than an hour, and a little while later we could see girls holding piles of thin books at their chests and chatting with smiles.

They seemed to be having fun.

Whatever the genre, as long as they could smile alongside a large number of friends, it might be a form of happiness.

...but behind this happy tale there was most certainly a war between the circles.

For this day of decisive battling, *Nemunoki*, one of the three largest powers, brought 1500 copies of each of their newly printed Same-Sex Magazines.

With the number of admissions nearing at least twenty thousand, the number was anticipating that one in four people would want them.

It could be said to have been a fairly confident outlook.

Kunugi had chartered a four horsed carriage cart and brought in 1500 copies of their five new publications.

Conversely, *Kusunoki* had 3000 copies of their single new publication, and that in addition to 1000 each of their older works.

The contest appeared to have been decided from the beginning.

The three largest circles had four-people operations carrying out the distribution of their Same-Sex Magazines.

And while *Kusunoki* sold out, that was said to be because they had the least number of publications.

But as it happened...

"We printed out an additional 3000 issues!"

Seeing the parcel of Same-Sex Magazines carried in by a cart, the representatives of both factions made horrified faces.

Right, this was the homeground for the *Kusunoki* faction.

As long as they worked their printing press, they could bring in as many additional copies as they wanted.

Kusunoki sold out 9000 copies—

The legendary Same-Sex Magazine *Yeah, you're really nice* was wanted by every other participant, and that was how its name was going to be known in later years.

"...we forgot that this was away ground for us. Today we'll admit our defeat."

"But we're going to win the next one, miss Kusunoki."

"Yeah, looking forwards to it."

After they exchanged handshakes and Same-Sex Magazines they for some reason had satisfied faces as they went to return back to their hometowns.

Awww, how amazing these Same-Sex Magazines were—

What a relief that it all ended well, what a relief. That was all.

Now then, that was all for the introduction to the current situation.

The problems began here.

When I went to the Office the next day, the kettle set on the stove was whistling with boiling water.

However, there was no one there.

I called, but there was no reply.

There was no sign anyone was there, either.

Despite that, the stove had been left on.

I found a bizarre presence next to Grandfather's desk.

Same-sex magazines had a unique air of mystery that could be spotted at a glance, even if it was mixed with normal daily living.

"No way, did Grandfather...?"

Now that I said it, Grandfather's interest seemed to be drawn in by yesterday's event, and he event went down to see how things were going.

It would not be strange if he had received this back then.

"...publisher... not written. No colophon."

The cover was also peculiar.

There were no sparkling, beautiful young boys or oily beautiful young men.

There were the silhouettes of people drawn on a jet-black background.

Something like a chalk drawing of a man collapsed on the ground.

There were two such silhouettes, assembled so that they were holding hands and kissing.

It was closer to avant-garde art than a drawing.

Printing was on a B5 offset. Around thirty pages.

I quickly skimmed the contents.

The pages were blank.

To be specific, the pages were divided in frames, but there were no pictures drawn inside those frames.

Suddenly, I felt a sense of loss sort of like an anemia.

I was being dragged. I was being dragged off somewhere.

It was not towards the floor nor towards the ground.

Right, it was towards an open, milky white Same-Sex Magazine panel—

When I woke up, I was locked in.

The walls were white, the ceiling was white, the floor was white.
It was a bizarre space neither warm nor cold, with no furniture nor windows.
I realized right away that this was trouble.
And also what I should be doing.
I began searching for an exit.
I approached my face to the walls in the four directions and strained my eyes.
At a glance there were no seams in the walls, and it looked as if an eerie perfection was standing in my way.
What drew my attention was a crack that could not be seen with the eyes.
Given it was vertical, it could only be artificial.
When I followed it further along with my fingers, I could tell that it was in the exact shape of a door.
The wall had been dug out and fit back in. That was how it was built.
I firmly pushed it with both hands.
The wall bent with a noise and opened towards my side from the rebound. So it was in fact a door.
Beyond the door laid pitch black darkness.
Though it may simply have been that there was just a wall dyed black.
"....mh!"
I took off my shoes and tried to poke around the darkness.
There was something soft.
I could not get through. I could not push through.
I wore back my shoes and this time I tried pushing with my hands.
Something jellylike stopped me.
"I cannot go through..."
Even pushing fairly hard it did not look like I could push through the jelly wall.
Deciding to leave it be for a while, this time I felt the floor.
Not long and I discovered a bit of dirt.
They were footprints.
Someone had been here before me.
"You cannot mean that...?"
I searched my thoughts for any clue when, suddenly, I felt the presence of someone right next to me.
Y was standing there.
She was standing stock still, spacing out.
"Uhm..." she looked around and her eyes stopped on me. "Where're we?"
"Maybe," I answered her honestly. "We are inside a manga panel."
Booom!, a sound effect floated above her head.

"...what the hell was that."
Y could not follow along.
Even the leader of a same sex movement appeared powerless when it came to Fairy-Tale Troubles.
"As you have seen, that was an onomatopoeia."
It had become some sort of object and was floating in the air.
"Huh..."
Her voice said that she perhaps got it, but perhaps she had not.

"It is just floating there. It feels like this is the end."

"Of what?"

"Of what, she asks... think a little, really. It is within your sphere of knowledge."

"Huh? What?"

No good, then.

"I mean that this signals the end of what we should be doing in this panel."

I ignored Y, who was still spacing out, and tried stretching my hands towards that jelly darkness from before.

This time there was no resistance whatsoever, my hands passed through to the other side.

As I thought, this was quite the remarkable thing.

This was not human technology.

"Fairieees!"

They, who always came out with a 'yee-es!', did not appear.

"Come on, we go."

"Huh? Where?"

As I thought words would be pointless, I grabbed her ear and took her with me.

"Ow! I said ow!"

And like that we rushed into the darkness.

We did not walk the darkness for long when we quickly found ourselves in another white room.

It was a slightly larger room than the one before. The structure was the same.

And in that room there was someone I knew well laying on the floor.

"Assistant-san?"

He rose up from the blank floor with a yawn.

On the side there were several boxes full of preserved food and water.

"Could it be... that you read the Same-Sex Magazine?"

Assistant-san seemed apologetic as he nodded.

And that was how I came to be sealed in one of these prisons called panels.

"...so there's some kind of thing going on here, right?"

Y said something belated as she bit into a preserved cracker.

"We don't know what that is, so first of all we should be looking for an exit," went I.

"..."

Assistant-san gazed at the pale flame of the portable gas stove as it boiled water.

"Panels are the units around which drama is based."

"The drama began when I found the footprints in the first panel."

"By joining up with him in the first panel, a sound effect suddenly showed up."

Tah-dah!, words to that effect floated in midair.

That was it for the second panel.

The exit opened, so we carried the food boxes and moved into here, the third panel.

We were stuck as far as how this third panel would go.

"Still, we gotta try anything we can try... but honestly, I have no idea what to do here."

Y shrugged.

The rules of this world were that we should be causing something dramatic in a panel so that we could move forwards.

When we fulfilled the conditions, the onomatopoeia that appeared in the scene would show up, and that was how we knew the door had unlocked.

That was how this was constructed.

"There's nothing to cause an event with in here."

After water had boiled we made vegetable soup for three and sipped it in silence.

We finished eating and we had some tea, then we rested.

We had a mountain of time, at least.

We ate, we slept, we roamed about the room... that was all for our days.

"...bet that no one who reads this manga has any fun."

Y felt listless as she sighed.

There was a mechanical *'thunk'* sound and the inside of the panel became a little darker.

This was not the first time this had happened, either.

"Again. It got dark again. It's getting darker and darker in here."

"I wonder what that means."

The world of panels did not have specific light sources.

It had an overall brightness.

In a mere half a day, no longer than that, we had had the light decrease accompanied by a mechanical sound multiple times.

As for what it meant, we could not imagine.

"..."

Assistant-san spoke with his eyes.

"Eh? Things are becoming worse? Right... it certainly feels like they are."

Looking at our exchange with half-opened eyes. Y blurted this out.

"How about we try making this into a love comedy instead?"

I suspected that this woman is misunderstanding my relationship with Assistant-san and making it bigger than it was.

"What development would that be."

"Something like bumping into each other at a corner?"

"We have no corners here."

"A bathing scene were the boy jumps at the girl he likes."

"We have no showers here."

"A ball comes flying in and he covers her with his body."

"We have nothing flying about here."

"...no such thing as a love comedy out of nowhere, huh."

Y flopped down on the spot and moaned out a *'huff oh man!'*

"Please stop that, it is unseemly."

A dramatic event: love was certainly one possible choice.

...we had a man and a women here.

I shook my head.

"But that would not be the love between men that you so like?"

"It's how we don't have two men."

"..." went Assistant-san.

"Eh? We do at least have two women?"

"Vetoed."

"Vetoed, vetoed."

"..."

"What? So how do we make some drama? Well..."

This was a manga, so we had to have drama appropriate for a manga, did we not.

The idea just popped up in my head.

"There are other genres in manga beyond love between men."

"Yeah, there's many. There's story ones, gag ones, business ones, sport ones, there's American comics, single panels, yonkomas, BL, otome, etcetera etcetera. There's a distinction between boys' mangas and girls' mangas, too."

"So what do you think this manga is about?"

"Huh? It's not a manga at all. We only left some unknown room and joined up with that guy... well, I suppose we could call it a mystery? It's sort of like a sealed room in here."

"I see, I understand. We have to make this a genre more representative of drama."

"And what genre's that."

"I suspect any genre is fine. As long as it is interesting."

Thinking about their traits, I did not think the answer could be a single one.

"I suspect we are to decide the genre."

"Well, we vetoed love and there doesn't seem to be anything we can use. What do we do?"

"If we are to make this healthy, how about we make it about sports?"

"Can't do anything but cricket."

"That was bowling."

"We got no lanes nor balls nor pins anyway."

"Track and field..."

"Way too cramped in here."

"Wrestling?"

"No thank you!"

Perhaps thinking that self-indulgent women were not reliable, Assistant-san lifted up his faithful sketchbook (of which he had used several dozens of). On it there was a very neat chess set drawn in free hand.

"Of course, a game that doesn't use electricity!"

Y spoke words I had never heard before.

"What is that?"

"Things like board games, it's a term that includes any kind of games not on a computer."

"Why is there a genre like that?"

"This is just what I believe, but it seemed to me that, in the past, the world of manga was on fire about non-electronic games."

"And again with words that make me think your brain has gone rotten..."

"It's easy to ship chess pieces, right? The knight as actually *uke* and the pawn is a *seme*, something like that. There's many pairings where juniors dominate their seniors, and lots of goods on sale... hurting pieces or something... printing them out in 3D is hard, so... it's better to personify the chess pieces... well, do we go with this?"

"I have no idea what any of the words you are using mean."

Sports with chess pieces were impossible inside manga frames.

And that was why it was a non-electronic game.

That was what Assistant-san was trying to say.

He cut out the pieces from the sketchbook and began playing a game.

"... " "... " "... "

...they were quite plain.

Placing paper pieces on a paper board was tiresome.

"Let's stop... this is boring."

The most impatient among us, Y, was the first to give up.

"It does not feel like this story is moving along."

"..."

Assistant-san drew a baseball diamond on the sketchbook.

"That seems even plainer..."

In the end we could not cause any real drama, we just wasted our time lazing about.

This happened as we were spacing out while having dinner.

There was another mechanical sound, the frame vibrated slightly, and the light lowered.

"It is getting quite dark..."

"It'll help us sleep easily."

"..."

"Eh? The room seems to be moving lower and lower, is that what you are saying?"

Assistant-san had that feeling.

"Now that you say it, it does feel like we fell a little."

"The panel is moving lower and lower... I wonder what that means."

"Couldn't tell you. We just don't have enough information."

"Staying in a bright white room for too long makes my eyes hurt."

"If this is a panel from a manga, then having no background or tools is bizarre."

"Maybe it just happened to be a panel like that?"

"Or perhaps they just didn't have time to draw the background. Well, whatever. It's just a dream anyway."

"A most dreary dream."

"..."

Assistant-san seemed to have thought of something as he stood up and walked to the wall. Then he took the pencil he uses for the sketchbook and smoothly drew a potted plant on the wall.

"My, well done."

I felt like smiling a little bit.

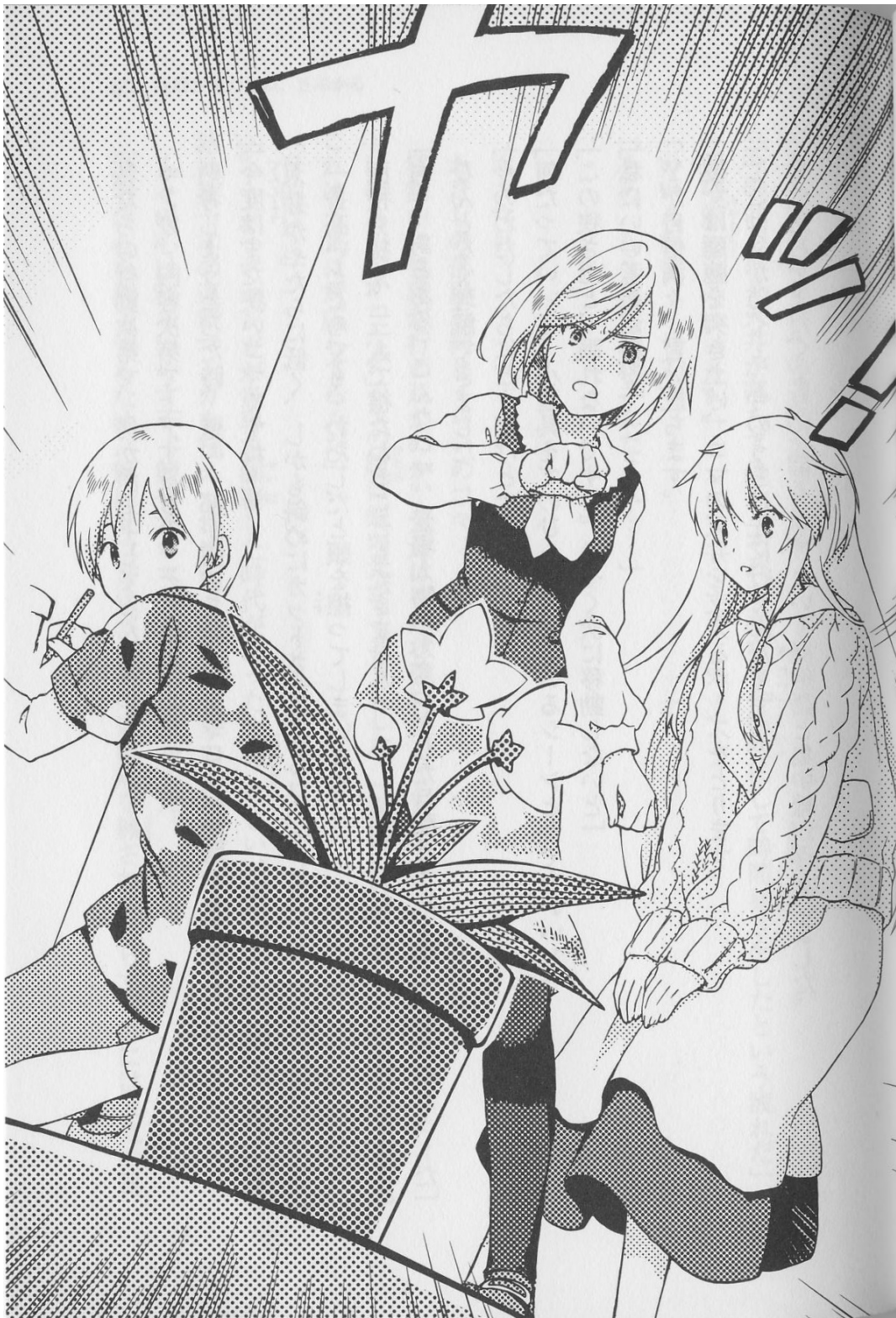
Assistant-san drew a second plant, then moved off to the side.

As Assistant-san passed past the pictures, the drawings vanished completely from the wall.

In their stead, actual potted plants that did not exist until a moment before appeared at the side of the wall.

"B-, but this is...!" went Y, surprised.

And then there was a '*dan!*' sound effect above her head.



"A '*dan!*' is fine, but what are these lines that go around the plants?"

"These're emphasis lines. It's one of the manga techniques. It's used when you want to emphasize something."

The plants drawn on the wall had become real.

In other words...

"Assistant-san, could you try some other things?"

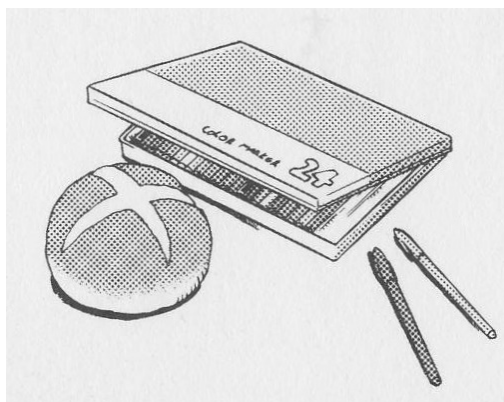
"..."

He made the pen run on the wall.

A box filled with 24 colored felt-tip pens fell to the floor, its contents jostled about.

Using those pens he drew even more.

Baked bread tumbled down to the floor.



Y did not hesitate and ate it.

"...it's good. It's edible."

"I see."

"Looks like we're gonna have to draw all the tools and the background we need on our own, then."

"So we ourselves are the authors of this manga."

The inside of the panel lit up bright.

A 'thunk' of a sound, then a sense of lifting that could be barely felt.

"Looks like we are ascending."

"Things move up or down depending on what we do."

Something in manga that went up and down depending on the contents: what could that be?

When things got heated, a part of the wall opened up and so did the path leading to the fourth panel.

"Another cramped panel!"

The ceiling was altogether too low, and worse, the panel was cut diagonally.

Even in the highest location I rubbed my head in the ceiling.

The area was also cramped, and all three of us could not lay on our side.

"Yeah, I know panels like these. This used to draw a little bit of attention to characters being introduced, it's a tie-in cut."

She somehow managed to understand this.

"This is how us three are tied in at present."

"Anything is fine, then. We cannot sleep. We should hurry and move to the next one."

"I got a good idea."

Y said that full of confidence.

She thrust up her arms and made a pose like she was supporting the ceiling.

"I will hold this back! You hurry up and go on ahead!"

A '*dan!*' sound effect with emphasis lines appeared above and at the sides of Y.

And then the path to the fifth panel opened up.

"Right now, the ceiling is falling, and I'm sacrificing myself to gain time, that's what I'm going with."

"Silly you, that has no attractiveness at all."

"But it's fine, we're just going along."

"Awww, this is totally the fairies' doing..."

Sixth panel.

It was a panel identical to my room.

Some processing had happened while we moved, it seemed, as the light had returned to the initial levels.

"Hah ha, I get it," there was a sharp light in Y's eyes. "If it's interesting it goes up, if it's boring it goes down. This works the same as popularity."

"And the point of it is?"

"...in the past, there was an age in which mangas ruled the world," said Y with an exaggerated, bombastic tone. "They fought against the fashions of an ever changing world, a number of serialized manga magazines held tight at the chest—"

People's hearts were easily moved, so there were many competing mangas.

To monopolize the hearts of the readers, the publishers had to constantly put out their best, and at times had to enforce decisions such as letting go of unpopular authors.

And the guiding line for those decisions was—

"The popularity questionnaire."

"...you also did some, correct?"

"Right so," and she snorted, looking proud. "You can try to take questionnaires out of mangas all you like, they can't be separated. After all, being able to accurately grasp the readers' needs is a shortcut towards a hit."

"So when panels move down, that is because their popularity goes down?"

"Conversely, when they rise that's because the results of the questionnaires is good."

"..."

Assistant-san raised a hand.

"Yes, boy."

"..."

"...mh? What is it?"

She could not understand Assistant-san's wordless words.

"He speaks with the eyes. To translate... we fall when popularity falls, something like that."

"That's obvious," Y answered with a face like it was extremely obvious. "That's when serialization finishes."

"Hang on a second..."

"..."

Assistant-san tugged my sleeve.

"Eh? Ah, of course you agree?"

"What about?"

"He is wondering what will happen to us once serialization ends."

"...we'll vanish into the darkness of unpopularity? We'll die?"

"I do hope it does not end so tragically..."

Though things may still become problematic.

"Also, the frames sometimes get darker, don't they. I think that indicates someone's reading the magazine."

"And the cover?"

"If a manga's interesting, crowds of readers will open the magazine and read it. But if it's boring, they'll close it up. The light changes according to their number... what do you think of that?"

"It sounds plausible. What surprises me is how sharp you are about this."

"So you thought I wasn't before now...?"

"I see, yes, popularity is the rule of the world of mangas, that is how it is."

What we needed to do was to avoid the end of serialization, making exciting panels, going for conclusions that led to exits... I suppose that was what was going to be.

At that, Y and I gave each other sidelong glances.

The Same Sex King held the key to this event.

...I felt sooo uneasy.

Our voyage into the world of mangas began in earnest.

As the panels went on, conditions for completion became stricter and stricter.

"The more a story goes on, the more stimulation readers seek."

As far as this went, we found it worth it to trust Y's opinions.

"The majority of readers prefer straight balls to curveballs. The easiest way for that is to have developments that they've seen already."

I could feel Y recovering her self.

It forcibly reminded me of the skill she used to cause the social phenomenon of a Same-Sex Magazine fever in less than a mere month.

I could also say that I had a bad feeling about this.

And the bad feeling hit the mark.

A temple had been drawn in this panel, one done so well it felt solemn.

Assistant-san had put its own soul into this background, finishing it using screen tones.

"C-, come at me!"

Y and I faced each other with massive swords in hand.

We were even wearing armor.

They were not armors that imprisoned our whole bodies, they prioritized fashion.

The swords were also the same.

As far as we knew they were distinctively different from weapons used in wars, they were swords apparently built with looking good as a priority.

These would not fit in the daily routines of the mangas found in a Same-Sex Magazine.

They only gave this serious impression that they were out of place.

Even these weapons had a similar ghostly air to them.

They were not weapons that could be seriously used in a war.

Y had designed them.

"T'eYAAAAH!"

Y was very into this as she charged with her massive sword held aloft.

I reluctantly blocked that with my own weapon.

And then I uttered the line we had decided beforehand.
"Hand over Assistant-san, would you kindly!"
"You gotta put way more feeling into it! Give it up, it's over for humanity!"
"I am fine with it being over, however."
"Don't start talking realistically! The possibilities for humanity are still not crushed! I hope."
"This is much too embarrassing!"
I could just barely push her back.
"Think you can make a Same-Sex Magazine by worrying about appearances!"
Sword met sword.
Assistant-san had a mouth gag and was playing the part of Y's prisoner.
He was at a distance of twenty paces.
Y hopped backwards. And then she thrust forwards her left hand and,
"Fire *no jutsu*!"
A fire attack came from inside her gauntlet, which I awkwardly avoided.
But I could not fully dodge it, and the fire tangled with me.
As it was not real fire, I was not burned.
"Could you keep up with the details? It doesn't feel like you're dodging seriously there!"
"I am not good at acting... w-, water cannon *no jutsu*~!"
Similarly, I fired a water counterattack from one hand.
It hit Y's flame straight on and, for some reason, they canceled each other.
"Well done."
"You too."
"But that only lasts until I finish you with my sword!"
When we once again clashed with our weapons, at long last a 'sha-kin!' onomatopoeia appeared.
"And so... we finished the twentieth panel at last."
It felt quite long...
We cast off these embarrassing clothes and untied Assistant-san.
We brewed some tea and took a breather, then we had to move to the next panel.
Stagnation lead to a fall in popularity.
"Them hurdles're getting higher and closer together, I'm sure of it."
"Say, I am kind of tired of sword and magic fantasy."
"Oh, you're really sharp, aren't you."
"Huh?"
"I think the boom for the sword and magic genre's about to end. Might be nice to change course starting with the next one."

Our adventure continued from frame to frame.
We had large frames, tiny frames, flat frames, long frames.
We acted as best we could in this variety of frames.
Y's interpretation was correct. She could anticipate the hearts of the readers, she had a sort of genius for it.
At times we staked our youth in sports.
At times we wore superhero suits and crushed evil in skyscrapers.
We did our best at absurdist comedy, and we were chased by monsters.
We burned from unrequited love, we ground our teeth at betrayal, we were swallowed by the currents of history, we satirized politics in a single panel, we had exaggerated reactions at

eating good food.

We were never going to let readers get bored.

As proof, the questionnaire never came down ever since then.

"Let's do the next as a yonkoma. What do you think?"

Y, wearing pajamas, was writing down her impressions on a notebook while laying on a bed.

This panel had walls filled with drawings of the night sky, so we used it as bedroom.

"Are you sure? It seems to me that we have been having the same types of panels in succession."

"Don't we. But a yonkoma's hard on its own. We're gonna have to think this through."

Y was beginning to nod off.

And still it was proper to leave everything about mangas to her.

"Assistant-san, could you make us some soap?"

"..."

"Something that smells nice."

He nodded and made his pen run on a blank part of the wall.

The flower patterned soap he smoothly drew tumbled down to the floor.

He picked it up and went to the box shower in a corner of the room.

This too had been manufactured via drawing.

Being able to clean ourselves meant we slept well, without hunger or thirst.

That was what humanity was all about.

Sitting cross-legged on my own bed and drying my hair with a dryer was happiness.

This was civilized living.

"Huh? Do you know what happened to my knife?"

When we sorted through the crates in preparation for the adventure tomorrow, I found that my favorite pocket knife had disappeared.

The two shook their heads.

"Didn't you use it in the last panel? Yeah, in that scene where you were so angry by adultery that you shouted 'thief' at that other woman and killed her by stabbing her from behind."

"Ah, I might have used it there..."

"And you just left it there, didn't you?"

Although I did not remember, it may have been as she said.

"..."

"What? You will get me a replacement knife? Thank you. But it has to be something I am accustomed to using..."

There was no way of going back to a previous panel in this world.

The passages that led to other panels vanished after being used once.

"Say, could you draw a door to the previous panel?"

Assistant-san tilted his head. He did not understand that.

Still, he took the pen and drew a tall door on the wall anyway.

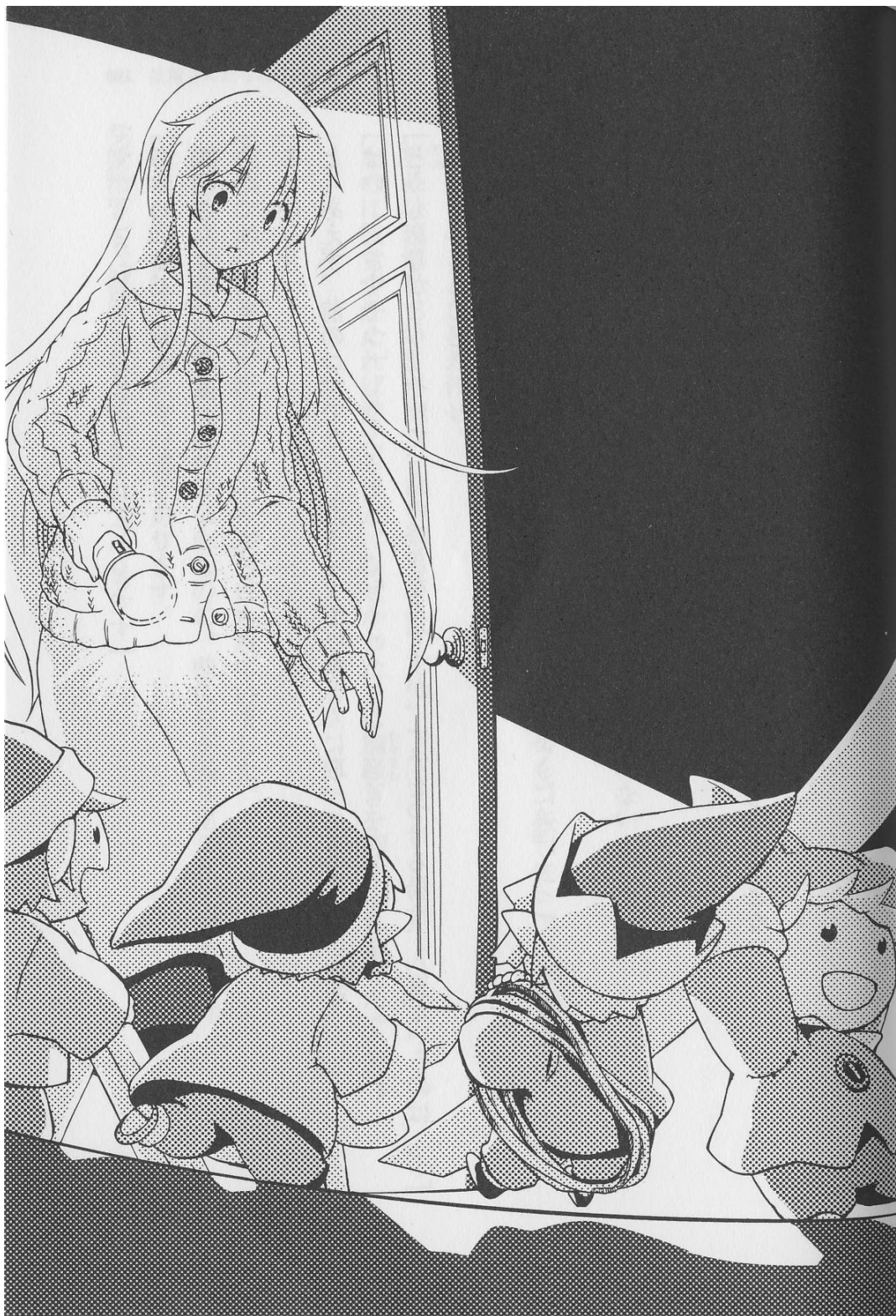
The door materialized and gained a natural color.

I tried opening it and found darkness on the other said.

I tried lighting my pocket flashlight.

A number of fairies were standing at my feet.

"Awww!" "We got found!" "It's a human!" "Been so long!"



"Fairies appeared in the passage...!"

The fairies were carrying materials like bamboo strips, elastic bands, and milk bottle caps, carting them off somewhere.

"W-, what are you doing?"

"We're editing stuff?"

"I knew it... it was you people who made all this."

"These are the margins?" "We're so doing this!" "Editing in the margins is our domain!"

One of the fairies was carrying a vertical board with *reading a human's manga can only make you jump!* written on it. I did not understand what that meant.

"Margins are the gaps between the panels, right."

"Yes!" "They're passages used for editing!" "Humans can't pass through." "Will you try to pass through?"

"Please tell me how we can leave this place."

"...whaaa..."

They were expressionlessly disappointed.

But I wanted to leave. I very much wanted to leave.

"Please tell me."

"Once you reach the final punchline, you can leave."

"And to leave right away?"

"You can end serialization..."

To end serialization... we need to reach the bottom of the bottom of popularity, correct?"

"That's right!" "The bottom!" "The very bottom!" "The base, man, the base!"

"It will not end badly for us?"

"What if it does?"

So it might.

"It's the end of serialization, so!" "It's the end!" "The end of life!" "The manga will get dead!"

"Those who strive for public servancy are to be feared!"

"Concretely speaking, what will happen?"

The fairies spoke heavily.

"It won't end well."

"That sounds scary..."

For now, I will have the fairies bring my lost knife back from the previous panel.

"Yes, the stabby one!"

"Who're you talking to?"

Y peeked in.

The fairies panicked and scattered pell-mell like baby spiders.

"Why you!"

"Wasn't there something small right there?"

"There were fairies, seriously!"

"Eh? Those there? I didn't really see them...?"

Right, they did not mind Assistant-san, but the fairies did not show up when she was around.

"Say, what are the blanks outside manga panels?"

"Well, they're margins, that's what they're usually called, I guess."

"So you did know. Editing is the pillar."

"God is in the details, so I know."

I told Y how to leave this world of mangas.

"I just knew it. We need to keep up the popularity and get to the ending."

At present, we had succeeded in doing that.
However, popularity was fluid. We had no idea what was going to happen next.
"It's all right. If that happens, I'll get serious."
We left everything related to mangas to her.
That I understood.
Despite that, the more passionate she was, the less I could restrain the noise in my heart, for some reason.

A new rule had been established when we reached the next panel.
Although there was no change in how the panel itself was white, there was an announcement on the wall.
The popularity ranking of Same-Sex Magazines was written on it.
"The fairies are really on the move..."
"A popularity ranking, huh. How should we take this, I wonder."
"Maybe Same-Sex Magazines are being spread all over the world."
I answered Y's question with confidence.
"The Same-Sex Magazines are literally drawing in the readers..."
"So there are many like us out there...!"
"Likely."
The top ten was listed in the ranking.
"This blinking light is our magazine."
"So it seems."
This was how the Same-Sex Magazine was named.

I Will Live On, As Is My Role

I believe it was untitled back when I picked it up in the Office.
It seems that it was automatically named given what we had done so far.
At present, *I will live on, as is my role* was in the sixth position.
"So we're not at the top."
Y whispered that, unsatisfied.
"How do we receive the questionnaire?"
"It feels like the fairies are using some roundabout way to gather ballots from human readers."
"Then this is the final battle for Same-Sex Magazines... I understand."
Being in sixth place in her field surprisingly did not put her down.
"Could you repeat the miracle of the open house?"
"Definitely. I'm gonna get it done, ain't I."
With the results now before her, Y showed even more enthusiasm.
"Mangas begin by attracting and end by attracting. Attraction is the hidden secret behind gaining popularity."
She repeated the word 'attraction' multiple times.
She meant a technique where the pauses of the story were where suggestive new developments were introduced.
So far, we have only heated up the locations we were in.
Fighting, confessions, contests, effort...
"But that's not gonna work anymore. Our opponents are at the same level."
"And so, attraction."

"As long as we make our attraction well, we will be able to toy with the hearts of our readers like they were sailboats in the stormy seas."

"Ohhh."

I did not quite get the point right then and there, but if she said so, that was how it was going to be. Maybe.

"Just acting out our roles isn't enough. We need the spirit to break through those roles!"

Y stuck her right hand at me and took a tilted pose.

Right around her head there floated the words '*dun dun dunnn!*'.

"Ah, looks like we are done with this panel."

"Wait a sec, I gotta tell you something before that."

Y then declared something with a much lower tone of voice than before.

"What is it?"

"Truth is... I killed him."

She spoke out like she was acting.

Assistant-san and I looked at each other.

What is she talking about?

Dunno.

Did she go wrong in the head?

Maybe.

There was something bothersome here, but as far as the job, I could more or less push through.

"...uhm, who did you kill?"

"Cock Robin."

"Huh?"

"I killed Cock Robin!"

There was a dull fanfare that went '*tah-dah*'.

It was the sound effect that informed us of movement in the rankings.

"We are now rank 5?!"

"Just as I thought."

"...so it was you who killed Cock Robin?"

"Well, no."

"That makes no sense... you are breaking the logical connections between sentences in the story..."

"Got no need for 'em."

"Of course we do!"

"Of course we don't."

Y asserted that with sparkling light down the bottom of her eyes.

"As long as the attraction has impact, it doesn't matter if it ignores everything that's happened before. No, rather, it's better if it completely destroys everything that happened before!"

"This is stupid..."

"No, it's true. Consumers demand surprises. The proof of that is in the change in ranking."

"B-, but still, now that you killed Cock Robin, how are we going to conclude the story now? Do you have any idea?"

"There's no need for ideas."

"Eh?"

"There's no need to have any ideas right now. We can have them later. We just need to keep up with impactful attractions. Enough that we don't need to have a conclusion."

"Huh?"

"After all, when it's gonna come to that, we'll be having the last issue."

*The best entertainer is/
the best swindler.*

—me

...or maybe not, but that aside, Y continued.

"Actually... I'm your little sister!"

'Tah-dah!'

"Actually... Assistant-san is the enemy of my parents, and I was looking for a chance to get revenge."

'Tah-dah!'

"Actually... I'm an alien!"

'Tah-dah!'

"Actually... well... I am a man."

'Tah-dah!'

I Will Live On, As Is My Role was now ranked first.

"How about? It's easy to engross the readers, really!"

"...you made a complete mess of the story, however."

Myyy, how awful this was.

It was simply awful. Nothing but that.

"So, right now we are in the 178th panel, so... we have really come along, have we? I wonder when the end will come?"

"..."

"What? We should just make a hole in the panel and read the editing comments on the sides?"

As soon as he said it, Assistant-san drew a hole in the wall.

The hole promptly became real, after which I jutted my head outside of the panel.

There was a rustling sound and I felt the fairies running away.

And on the sides,

Currently exploding in popularity! How will it end? See you next issue!

"Aww, that is data too, indeed."

If they added separate comments per frame, we could be able to see even things that we could not when inside the manga.

"Well done!"

I patted Assistant-san's head.

"It's too early to get comfortable. It's important to keep that popularity, too."

And that was why the '*actually*' series was going to continue for a while.

"Actually... I thought I was a man, but I was actually a woman!"

'Tah-dah!'

"Truth is... I'm a spy sent to Kusunoki Village, and I killed and replaced the original me."

'Tah-dah!'

"Actually... I have a twin, and we exchanged places before coming here!"

'Tah-dah!'

Besides preserving our first ranking, we did not slack off on checking the side comments.

And now, on to the final battle!
Charge onwards to a well earned victory!
Anime version announced! Details in the next issue!
Next issue we introduce a new character!

"...the comments seem to be entirely random, how come?"
"That's 'cause the developments are too dynamic and the editors can't predict 'em. They can only write stuff that entices and makes people want more."
"Contents and comments are both made up on the spot, then..."
"And ain't that's nice!"
It was sort of fidgety... this world here.

The 217th panel.
Our popularity had dropped.
The warning sound came for the first time in a while, and we felt the whole of the panel lower.
I Will Live On, As Is My Role had fallen to second place.
"No problem, I tell ya. We just need to make a stir."
Y asserted that vigorously with assurance about her theories for victory.
And then we continued with more spectacular developments and more impactful attractions.
For a while, nothing happened.
However, we suddenly dropped to third rank.
"So sincere story developments are actually better?"
"Not true at all! The crowds want stimulation. If only we had more... more shocking developments... right, let's have a final boss that actually be a foreigner that loves Earth. And then we should just make the protagonists be actually making a mistake."
"I really hope that works..."
It did not work.
"We fell to fifth rank! Why! It makes no sense!"
"No, that is readily understandable."
Assistant-san nodded next to me.
"Why?"
"It is too single-patterned, people are getting tired of it."
"But the readers were just getting used to that!"
"What... did you say?"
"Let us have a look at the side comments."
"Uhm, I am reading. ...next week we have the climactic final chapter!"
"But it's totally not the final chapter!"
"And you said we should just make something up..."
"No, really, we're kinda being made fun of by the side comments here, aren't we!"
"Given what we do, they have been making plenty of fun of us, of late."

Next issue, the final event... but is that a good way to go?
Smash it! Father's dream!
Yesterday I ate a chocolate chip cookie.
Anime version canceled! Sorry!

"...and these are the latest comments."

"They just don't want to do thiiis!"

"I though it would be too shocking so I did not say this before."

"That's got nothing to do with it! More likes, that last thing about the anime, they're just making fun of us! What's 'sorry' here, what's 'sorry'!"

"Ah, but it does not feel wrong, you know?"

"It's even more awkward! They're so damn airheaded!"

Y shouted like a beast as she walked about the panel.

"Oh for... we gotta push 'em out... what's a good idea..."

Assistant-san approached Y and tugged her sleeve.

"Eh... what're you talking about? Awww, please translate."

"He is just telling you to come with him for a moment."

Assistant-san took Y to the hole in the wall.

"So I hafta look... wait, isn't there something like a machine outside the columns?"

"Here, look, right there."

We thrust our heads outside of the hole and saw.

"Really. I wonder what these ropes are for?"

There were several ropes stretched taut, hanging off the winch installed outside the columns. It disappeared into the darkness and we could not see what it was supporting.

"This is hand spun. Let's try it."

And the instant she said that, Y started acting.

"Why, so brazen!"

"Bwah, too hard, don't struggle, we're too close together! What do we do if I fall down outside the columns like in some gag manga!"

We struggled and the lynchpin came off, making the ropes scatter in every direction.

"Wah-wah?!"

"The panel!"

Suddenly there was no more pressure and we panicked.

The floor was moving away from our feet.

Two meters, three meters...

"This is bad, if we move too high we won't be able to descend anymore! Let go!"

"W-, we are already plenty high up... 'ei!"

We landed on the floor with quite the impact.

"So our popularity has gone down?"

"No, the panel's getting larger!"

Y accurately identified the situation.

A moment later, the enlargement stopped.

The panel then became as wide as a school gymnasium.

As the room expanded considerably, the hole that was below shoulder level was now far above us.

"So that winch was holding up the frame."

"They were not ropes, but frame lines, is that right?"

"...we can use this."

"To recover our popularity?"

"Yeah. We haven't been able to adjust the panels ourselves so far. And so it was difficult to get things done the way we wanted. Given that we had to fit what we were doing to the panel

no matter what, right? But now we can cut them the way we want."

"I do not think this is going to be that dramatic a change..."

"Well, just you wait and see."

There was a loud 'thunk' sound effect, and far above me as I was taking a stance with two guns, something like a cloud passed past.

Simultaneously, our rankings went from fourth to third.

"See!"

Y rushed over with a satisfied face.

After the panel reached maximum size, Y took a stylish'n'kewl pose (according to her), explaining that this was going to really move the readers.

This was called a two-page spread.

That was the name of the larger pictures drawn without dividing them into panels.

"Oi, Assistant-kun. That's enough. Good job."

Assistant-san, who was set up to lose in this final battle, abruptly stood up.

"And aren't we coming back one rank in one go!"

But as it happened, it did not go so well.

The instant we reached the third two-page spread, our ranking once again dropped to fourth.

"B-, B U T W H Y ?"

"I told you, they are getting tired of these things, we just keep repeating the same cheap stuff."

"Gah... then should we combine the techniques we've used so far?"

"You should have reached that conclusion much earlier."

Although belatedly, I had the impression we were going back to what we needed to think about to begin with.

Showing off, attraction, easy ways, double page spreads: by combining numerous dramatic techniques we could avoid things ending as mere pretenses, instead catching more human tales.

Thinking in a roundabout way, that was the shortest route, in the end.

It was all too fast.

As price for this symbolic drama, we had to pay off a number of foreshadowing that we had just thrown out there, and that was quite the work for us.

We cut corners, and although Y too came to understand that developments had to be plain, things moved little by little.

This genre that could only be called SF-mystery open-sea-battle adventure love high-fantasy horror had a poorly crafted and threadbare plot.

To pull back this twisted story into something simple and impactful required thinking so hard our brains nearly turned to mud.

We eliminated unnecessary settings, solved contradictions, and eliminated foreshadowing we were not going to go back on.

By the 230th panel we had gone through twist and turns and finally came up with a new plot based on Shakespeare's A Midsummer Night's Dream, and though the plot was so forced it nearly flew apart, we managed a crash landing.

"...I wonder what rank we are now."

Y whispered that, worried.

Our story had already fallen below the top ten.

"It sort of got really dark in here."

"The end is near. We gotta pull things together."

"This is the scene where Lysander the aristocrat falls in love with Helena."

"Lysander, huh," and Y made an amused smile. "Sounds like attack magic."

"Get off that train of thought!"

I was fed up with this hodge-podge entertainment.

But all that aside, this tale of love between humans and fairies with woods as its stage was economical.

Popularity drew a downwards line.

As long as we keep up this sober plotline, we were never going to see an increase in ranking.

At some point, the title of our Same-Sex Magazine changed to *I Knew It, There's A Punchline, Isn't There?*

So the title said, but...

Several panels later, our popularity went down yet again.

The light in the panel disappeared in an instant, and we could no longer see the back of our hands if we stretched them out.

"This is bad, this is definitely bad..."

"Bad as it may be, we can only continue with this plot."

"This sort of mangas may be well received among a selected core fans, but it can never draw the eye of the general public!"

"But I am utterly tired of the way you do things!"

"Grrr... grrr...!"

Y bit her lower lip and her gaze wandered restlessly.

Being the president of a same-sex magazine, the present situation was hard on her.

But no matter how little she liked how things were going, it was impossible to change the plot at this point.

"This type of plot may become popular. But when it does, it has to reach the highest standards among its genre, or it will be uncertain whether it has really grown back its popularity, right?"

"Well... that's true, but... grrr...!"

The excess of disappointment drained the color from her silver hair, making her face look pale.

Y took to her knees in disappointment.

"Give it up, o friend of mine," I declared arrogantly, looking at her from above. "Same sex has declined."

"AuUUUGH!"

And as we were talking about nothing, we ranked down again.

I see, it did not look like Shakespeare was popular in the world of manga.

Assistant-san drew a spotlight and lit the inside of the panel.

I was startled.

Forget her usual pallor, Y looked like she had lost her color and had become white.

It was global (?), even her clothes had become white.

"You know that you lost all your color?"

"...and you too, for that."

"Eh? No way."

It was true.



And not just me, even Assistant-san was whited out.
Worse, the contour lines were fading... what to say, it felt like we were drawn just with a series of ellipses.

"Hahah, this here's a comedy."

"W-, what do you mean?"

"With no more popularity, the artist finally lost his professional touch. And when that happens, this is how it ends," she shouted out as if to emphasize her laughter. "They just submit a draft!"

That was the final blow.

The panel rumbled loudly, the shaking getting worse and worse.

"It seems that our fated time has come."

The sketch that was once Y seemed quite calm.

"What is a draft?"

"The rough version before pencils come in. It's just enough to tell where the lines and the characters go. In other words..."

She was nothing but a bunch of random lines at this point as she spread her arm-like parts at the sides. "Nothing else but this."

The panel was dragged all the way down like an elevator.

It was dropping.

To the conclusion that was Hell.

"Please at least use the penciiiiiiils!"

My shout dragged long, but was swallowed by the ocean of unpopularity.

It will not end well.

I remembered the words of the fairies.

And how was it going to end?

Life after the end was filled with difficulties.

One fairy floated near me as I was drifting lazily through space.

This was a dream.

It was vague, but that was how it felt.

And the fairy was using the dream to sentence me.

"Master human!"

"Yes?"

"This is the end!"

"...it is."

"We won't be making a tankobon."

"That is too bad."

"Manga is hard to kill."

"Right..."

Having a manga end made it difficult to continue on to the rest of one's life, especially when one had reached thirty, forty years of age.

"We're giving you a penalty!"

The fairy handed me an envelope.

Inside... there was the specifics of said penalties.

And this is what they said.

You have been ended. As penalty, you are cursed to carry on your family's business.

"....."

That was the tale of after the end.

Sorry, fairies.

I was already carrying on the family business.

"Oi, wake up. 'Oi!"

Grandfather shook me and I woke up.

We were in the Office. Nothing had changed.

Assistant-san and my worst friend, who had woken up before me, were spacing out on their chairs.

It felt that they missed their shot at glory a little.

"Ahhh... she came back... what a relief."

"Were you dreaming or something?"

"Something like that.

As per my duty as Mediator, I started searching for that Same-Sex Magazine.

But it had disappeared.

"I believe there was a Same-Sex Magazine with a blank cover around here, have you seen it?"

"Yeah, that was me. I brought it in yesterday... but it vanished."

Having fulfilled its duty, it vanished, then.

It was a Same-Sex Magazine made by fairies.

Their magazine was... really difficult.

It ought be prohibited.

Now then.

About the Same-Sex Magazines, whose boom and production seemingly passed as the uproar settled.

In the end, they came to survive.

They came to hold open houses in Kusunoki Village by targeting young girls.

The larger events were only held once or twice a year, but smaller events were held frequently.

Though not on the scale she was used to, Y continued to publish magazines.

Once, after a sudden realization, I decided to secretly participate in a circle.

The name of the circle was *Shirakaba*.

It had no particular meaning. We just made it up.

I could draw illustrations, but I could not draw mangas.

And there, as mere hobby and aside from my actual job, I gathered fragmentary data of abridged texts from the old civilizations and brought them with me.

Though my participation was secret, once I came to an event I was discovered by Y.

She skimmed my Same-Sex Magazine and said this while looking at me from above.

"There's no moe drawings, you're always going to be pico."

"Pico?"

"One trillionth. Means you suck. Heh heh heh."

"Go! A! Wa! Y!"

"Fine, fine. See you, have a nice day."

That was a woman who never worked and just played all day.

She should just go cry herself to sleep and soon, was how I cursed her behind her back.

Sales of my magazine amounted to four copies.

Fairy memo ~ Fairy Same-Sex Magazine

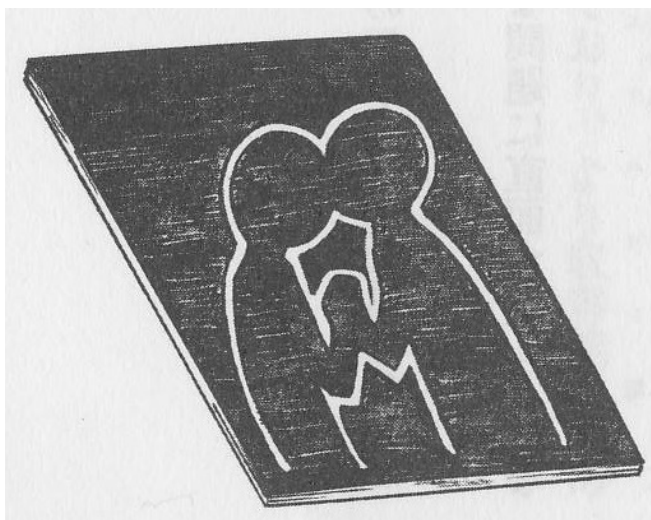
This is the Thin Book that the fairies distributed after the Same-Sex Magazine boom. The people who read it are sucked inside the frames, so they can draw all sorts of human drama.

It is also connected to other Same-Sex Magazines of the same type using a ranking system. If popularity drops too far, they are ended. Once the end comes, the now-old author has no hope of changing jobs and has no choice but to continue their family's business.

The world of Same-Sex Magazines is cruel.

How actually that's just a warning, and no one is compelled to do so, will be kept secret.

It is said that in many areas of the world they are used as places to present the plays they created to their fellow authors in secret.



Periodic report - Winter

1. First half

On X/XX a flying ace contest sponsored by the UN was held, and our Kusunoki Village's Cannon Club had an entry.

The contest had a rural mood to it, progressed without delays, and headed straight for a safe conclusion without any significant problems.

At the end of the contest the Count Van der Graaf Zeppelin, the aircraft of the winning team, Light Blazers, managed to rise higher than the rules allowed, and although that caused some uproar in the venue, there were no injured as the aircraft safely landed.

Sadly, our Kusunoki Cannon Club had problems with their craft and had to retire.

2. Second half

A little bit of a boom of Same-Sex Magazines happened in our Kusunoki Village.

Cultural products such as mangas and novels were compiled into simple books and distributed. Those were the Same-Sex Magazines.

It's said that, once, Same-Sex Magazines were popular all over the Earth. Same-Sex Magazines flourished to the extreme, also thanks to a number of superlatively skilled people. Welcoming this boom, Kusunoki Village hastily held a Same-Sex Magazine open house, which vastly surpassed expectations and was visited by over twenty thousand young people. Not ready for it, there was some confusion in the Village, but the participants were all polite and the open house reached its closing without issues.

As with the flying ace contest, events of this sort were held frequently, and as a Mediator I'm happy to see that people live in proper and civilized ways.

The only problematic point is that participants found the venue too small for their numbers, and it appears necessary to move the events into a much larger venue.

Afterword

Pleased to see you after all this time. I am Tanaka.

It's been a year Plus Alpha.

As for what I've been doing in this year Plus Alpha... working, of course. And then living on top of that. Not just life. Living with all my strength.

That's not merely living from a beginning to its end.

I've been trying to live a life that can't be ignored. I could write *professional liver - Romeo Tanaka* on my business card.

Living is really one big series of problems.

Well, I'm getting sort of tired of living, so this year I'll *Gaga* more than last year. That's what I call releasing books under Gagaga Bunko.

As long as some youth with a pompadour doesn't point a gun at me and goes, "*we just don't need that no more, you old fart!*", I believe I'll be writing books until people are tired of them.

Let's talk games.

Not how to play, the games that I make, the ones I write the scenarios for.

All in all, making new plans is beginning to get more difficult.

Without plans that are certain to be no-risk and high-rewards, no creator will actually give their GO sign (this passage does not contain sarcasm and malice).

As for what no-risk high-rewards means, for example, it's having the guts to go, "*sell me a Benz. But I don't want to pay for it!*" (this is merely an example, I'm not criticizing the business world).

As for exceptions, using a harem school genre as a hook for sales still feels like it's a plausible and popular genre.

School harem are actually really nice (not).

But I'm sorry to say that, since we didn't have any plan at hand for those, I kept my eyes on the game side for a while as I shone in all colors depending on the case.

Though I've certainly not given up on my dream of profiting from eroge and buying me a castle in Germany.

That one thing's for sure.

Now then, I have an announcement.

The new game I've written the scenario for has been published.

Key, famous for *Clanned*, which has also been made into an anime, as well as *Little Busters!*, has a new game, *Rewrite*, scheduled for release on April 28th.

It's a love adventure you can install on your PC and play.

It's an all ages game, so anyone can play it.

It's a little more expensive than a tankobon, but there's more than enough to play to be worth the price, I believe.

I would be very happy if you bought it.

Well then, we may or may not meet somewhere out on the crossroads of destiny.

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This is an unofficial fan translation. Please support any official release.